

Lesson 10

August 9, 2026

Donkeys and Divine Providence:

God is sovereign over His entire creation.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

The Bible features numerous references to donkeys, but this lesson focuses on three specific instances. First, is the story of Balaam's talking donkey, which illustrates God's ability to convey His message through extraordinary means. Second is the account of Saul's search for his father's missing donkeys – a quest that led him to Samuel, whom God told to anoint Saul as Israel's first king. Last is the prophecy and fulfillment of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt. These stories show that God can work through even the most humble beings to fulfill His purposes, reminding us of His power to act through people who choose humility and submission.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Donkeys are referred to more than a hundred times in the Bible. Typically, donkeys are used to symbolize humble service and perseverance. They are contrasted with horses, which typically represent war and pride, while donkeys symbolize peace and servitude. Donkeys are depicted both literally as essential beasts of burden and metaphorically to illustrate human stubbornness or endurance. Their frequent presence in Biblical stories reflects their vital role in ancient society and their symbolic value, which continues to inspire themes of humility and faithful service – and sometimes stubbornness.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

- 1. BALAAM'S TALKING DONKEY: Numbers 22:15-38.**
 - A. The Donkey Saw, (15-27)
 - B. The Donkey Spoke, (28-38)
- 2. WHEN DONKEYS LEAD TO CROWNS: 1 Samuel 9:1-20; 10:1.**
 - A. Looking for Lost Donkeys, (9:1-10)
 - B. Finding God's Man, (9:11-20; 10:1)
- 3. A DONKEY CARRIED THE MESSIAH: Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:1-11.**
 - A. The Messianic Prophecy, (Zechariah 9:9)
 - B. The Messiah Comes on a Donkey, (Matthew 21:1-11)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. BALAAM'S TALKING DONKEY: Numbers 22:15-38.

A. The Donkey Saw, Numbers 22:15-27.

The account in this passage offers a fascinating contrast between the spiritual awareness of Balaam's donkey and Balaam's blindness to divine intervention. The donkey, often considered a lowly and unremarkable creature, perceived the angel of the Lord standing in its path armed with a drawn sword. Three times, the donkey reacted to the danger a head – turning aside, pressing against a wall, and, finally, lying down under Balaam. Though seemingly stubborn to Balaam, these actions were acts of wisdom and self-preservation prompted by supernatural awareness. The irony here is striking: The donkey, a humble beast of burden, saw what the renowned prophet Balaam could not. This comparison highlights that spiritual insight is not reserved for the powerful or educated but is granted to those who are sensitive to God's presence.

Balaam's inability to see the angel reflects a profound spiritual blindness, one clouded by his own ambitions and desires. Despite being a prophet, his heart was divided, swayed by the promise of wealth and favor from Balak. It was only after the Lord opened the donkey's mouth and then Balaam's eyes that he realized the gravity of his situation. This passage gently reminds us that true vision comes not from status or intellect but from humility and alignment with God's will. Balaam's frustration with the donkey serves as a metaphor for our own impatience when circumstances don't align with our plans. Sometimes, we fail to see that God is guiding us away from harm. In this story, the donkey becomes an unexpected teacher, illustrating that even the most unlikely avenues can reveal divine truth if we are willing to listen and see.

B. The Donkey Spoke, Numbers 22:28-38.

The donkey played a pivotal role as an unexpected voice of reason and divine intervention. When Balaam's donkey saw the angel of the Lord blocking their path, it stopped three times, frustrating Balaam. The donkey's actions, though seemingly stubborn, were guided by a divine awareness that Balaam lacked. When God opened the donkey's mouth to speak, the pitiful beast challenged Balaam's mistreatment and forced him to confront his blindness to the spiritual reality before him. This moment demonstrates the unassuming nature of God's methods – using a lowly animal to convey wisdom and redirect Balaam's misguided path. The donkey became a vessel for divine insight, reminding readers that God can use even the most unexpected means to accomplish His purposes.

On the other hand, Balaam's rage reveals the human tendency to react with anger and frustration when our plans are disrupted. His repeated beating of the donkey exhibited his impatience and inability to perceive the larger picture. It was only when his eyes were opened to the angel of the Lord that Balaam realized the gravity of the situation and his error in judgment. This interaction was a bumbling moment for Balaam, as he transitioned from anger to submission and acknowledged God's sovereignty. Together, the donkey's role and Balaam's rage create a powerful narrative about seeing beyond immediate circumstances, listening to divine guidance, and recognizing that even apparent obstacles can be instruments of God's grace and protection.

Sometimes, we can become so absorbed in pursuing our goals and tackling the tasks before us that we fail to notice the Holy Spirit guiding us toward God's will. In moments like these, God often uses unexpected people or circumstances to catch our attention and redirect us. It's worth reflecting on the possibility that obstacles in our path might be a sign that God has a different plan for us. His guidance may come from sources we don't anticipate. Still, if we remain open and attentive to the Spirit, we can discern His voice, offering wisdom to either move forward with confidence or embrace a new direction.

2. WHEN DONKEYS LEAD TO CROWNS: 1 Samuel 9:1-20; 10:1.

A. Looking for Lost Donkeys, 1 Samuel 9:1-10.

In this section, we are introduced to Saul, "a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher (taller) than any of the people" (v. 2). These were qualities that set him apart as a choice candidate to be king. The passage begins with a seemingly ordinary task: Saul was sent by his father, Kish, to search for their lost donkeys. However, this ordinary errand became the background for a divine appointment. Accompanied by his servant, Saul demonstrated diligence and respect for his father's concern by traveling through multiple regions searching for the animals. This account shows how God often works through the ordinary and unexpected moments of life to guide individuals toward His greater purposes. Saul's humility and willingness to heed his servant's suggestions to seek the prophet Samuel also revealed his openness to guidance. This quality foreshadowed his future role as Israel's first king.

Additionally, the interaction between Saul and his servant revealed his faith and resourcefulness. When they decided to consult Samuel, the servant's willingness to offer a small gift showed both respect for the prophet and an understanding of cultural customs. This gesture reflected the importance of honoring spiritual leaders and seeking wisdom in times of uncertainty. The passage subtly reminds us that even small acts of preparation and thoughtfulness can open doors to divine encounters. As the story unfolds, it becomes evident that God was orchestrating events behind the scenes, using an ordinary search of lost donkeys to bring Saul into Samuel's path. This serves as a beautiful reminder that God's plans for our lives often unfold in ways we least expect, transforming everyday situations into pivotal moments of purpose.

B. Finding God's Man, 1 Samuel 9:11-20; 10:1.

Here we witness a remarkable example of divine orchestration as Samuel is guided by God to recognize Saul as His chosen man (v. 17). This passage highlights the interplay between human actions and divine providence. Saul, searching for his father's lost donkeys, is unknowingly led by God to encounter Samuel, the man of God. Meanwhile, God prepared Samuel by revealing that Saul would arrive and was to be anointed as the leader of His people. This moment shows how God works behind the scenes, aligning circumstances to fulfill His purposes. Samuel's obedience and attentiveness to God's voice allow him to discern Saul's significance, even though Saul himself seemed unaware of the extraordinary calling awaiting him.

This passage also emphasizes the importance of spiritual perception and trust in God's guidance. Samuel could have dismissed Saul as an ordinary young man on a mundane errand, but his relationship with God enabled him to see beyond appearances. God's declaration that Saul would be the one to deliver Israel from the Philistines reveals His sovereign plan and intimate involvement in the lives of His people. This encounter between Samuel and Saul serves as a reminder that God often chooses individuals for His purposes in ways that may seem unexpected or ordinary at first glance. It encourages us to remain open to His leading, trusting that He sees what we cannot and works all things according to His divine wisdom.

First Samuel 10:1 marks a pivotal moment in Israel's history when Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of Israel. This act signified God's choice and divine appointment of Saul to lead His people, symbolizing by the anointing oil poured on Saul's head. The gesture not only set Saul apart in his role but also represented the Holy Spirit's empowerment to guide him in his kingship. Samuel's declaration, "Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?" emphasizes that Saul's authority came from God, and his leadership was meant to serve God's purposes for His people. This verse underscores the importance of divine calling and the responsibilities that accompany it. It also highlights God's sovereignty in raising leaders to fulfill His plans. Despite Saul's later failings, this moment reflected a fresh beginning for Israel, demonstrating God's care and provision for the nation.

Sometimes, the tasks we are called to do, whether on the job or in the church, may seem unimportant, but when we are serving God, all that we do to accomplish His plans and purposes if we give our best and remain sensitive to the Holy Spirit as we perform our roles and responsibilities. If we are setting up chairs for a worship service, we should pray for the people who will sit there. If we are serving in the nursery, we should pray for the babies we are caring for in the Lord's name. There are no small jobs in God's Kingdom, but there are often people with small visions.

3. A DONKEY CARRIED THE MESSIAH: Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:1-11.

A. The Messianic Prophecy, Zechariah 9:9.

Zechariah 9:9 is a profound and prophetic verse that speaks of the coming of a humble and righteous king. Historically, this prophecy was written during a time when Israel faced turmoil and longed for deliverance from foreign oppression. Kings and conquerors of that era typically rode mighty horses or chariots as symbols of power and dominance. However, the imagery of the Messiah riding on a donkey conveys a stark contrast. A donkey was often associated with peace rather than war, symbolizing humility and servanthood. This prophecy pointed to a leader who would not come to conquer through force but to bring salvation and peace in a manner that defied worldly expectations.

This scripture portrays a profound image of leadership rooted in humility and peace, exemplified by Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. This deliberate act portrays a kingdom built not on domination or violence but on renewal, compassion, and justice. By redefining the concept of power, Jesus presented an alternative vision where grace and humility triumph over

force and coercion. For us as Christians, this passage serves as a timeless reminder of the values central to a life of faith: humility, peace, and God's justice.

B. The Messiah Comes on a Donkey, Matthew 21:1-11.

The story of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem is packed with deep symbolism. Jesus knew where the foal of the donkey would be, and He knew how to address the owners, who would inquire as to why His disciples were borrowing it. Jesus was aware of the prophetic moment about to unfold, and either through divine foreknowledge or preplanning, this young donkey was positioned where it needed to be for this moment. By riding on the humble colt of a donkey, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, revealing that He is the King of peace and humility, unlike the grandiose displays and attitudes of earthly rulers.

The crowd laid down cloaks and palm branches shouting "Hosanna" (v. 9), recognizing Him as the Messiah. However, most misunderstood His mission because they sought a political savior rather than a spiritual one. This moment exposed the tension between their expectations and the reality of Jesus' purpose. It also challenges us to reflect on our faith and ask if we are steadfast when His plans don't align with ours. It's a reminder to welcome Jesus with genuine trust and celebrate Him as the Prince of Peace.

The detail of Jesus riding an unbroken colt adds another layer of meaning. In Jewish tradition, animals unused for ordinary tasks were considered sacred, and this untouched colt symbolized purity and submission. It also showed Jesus' authority over creation, as the untamed animal submitted to Him peacefully. Instead of a warhorse, Jesus chose a humble donkey, emphasizing His kingdom of peace and servanthood over power and conquest. This scene invites us to embrace His humility and trust in God's greater plan.

Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt contrasts sharply with the pomp of worldly events like inaugurations or coronations. It highlights His humility and unwavering dedication to His Father's mission. This story challenges us to examine our motives. Do we seek human approval, or do we serve with hearts aligned with God's will? True service in God's kingdom seeks faithfulness, not recognition, even when the path is difficult or expectations go unmet.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

As disciples of Jesus, we need to be aware of those around us whom God may call to do great things for His kingdom. Our job is to encourage them while we help them grow in God's grace.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

The church should not focus solely on ministries that are most often in the spotlight but also recognize and honor the people who faithfully perform humble tasks.

Commonly Known Animals Mentioned in the Bible.

Oxen are mentioned 143 times in the Bible, but only 9 times in the New Testament. Oxen were very large, powerful animals use for plowing, pulling heavy loads, and treading out grain. They were also offered in sacrifice to God.

Horses are mentioned 152 times in the Bible, but only 16 times in the New Testament, mostly in The Revelation. Horses were domesticated thousands of years ago and have been used mainly for riding and for pulling and carrying heavy loads. Horsemen (soldiers riding horses) are mentioned 49 in the Bible, but only three times in the New Testament. (See Acts 23:23, 32; Revelation 9:16).

Donkeys are mentioned 140 times in the Bible, but only eight times in the New Testament (seven times in the Gospels, and once in 2 Peter 2:16). Donkeys, like horses, were domesticated thousands of years ago and were used for riding and for carrying or pulling heavy loads. Donkeys are not as strong or fast as horses, but they are more surefooted and have amazing endurance.

Camels are mentioned 58 times in the Bible, but only four times in the New Testament, by Jesus in His teaching. Camels were especially values for transporting people and cargo across the desert regions of the Bible lands.

Bulls, cows, sheep, and goats are mentioned hundreds of times in the Bible because of their value to farmers, herdsman, and as sacrifices offered to God.

Many people today have domesticated dogs as cherished pets. Dogs are mentioned 40 times in the Bible (nine times in the New Testament). In Bible times, Jew regarded dogs as unclean animals (Proverbs 26:11 and 2 Peter 2:22).

Many people today have domesticated cats as cherished pets, but such cats are never mentioned in the Bible. Lions are mentioned 122 times in the Bible (nine times in the New Testament), and leopards are mentioned eight times in the Bible (only once in the New Testament, in Revelation 13:2).

WORKSHEET

Animals and Humans

The word *speciesism* means (1) prejudice or discrimination based on species; (2) the assumption of human superiority on which speciesism is based.

A campaign to “stop speciesism” is promoted by animal-rights advocates who believe people are not superior to dogs, cats, or other animals.

From the Scriptures below, list ways people are different from animals:

1. Genesis 5:1-2:

2. Genesis 1:26:

3. Genesis 2:20:

4. 1 Corinthians 15:39:

5. John 6:40:

The truth is, as important as animals are, they are inferior to human beings. However, we can learn things from animals. In Isaiah 1:3, what did God’s people need to learn from donkeys?