In Praise of Donkeys

I grew up with horses, not a lot, but we had six of them. I personally had two horses while growing up. One was an Appaloosa, and the other was a Morgan (for those of you who know horses). I remember when my dad got me my first horse (it was the Appaloosa), his name was “amigo”, though the previous owner had called him “Companion”. My oldest brother had a couple of horses; one was a Tennessee Walking Horse, and the other an Arabian. My next older brother had a Quarter Horse. We also had a Belgium Horse (large working horse somewhat like a Clydesdale). Horses were cool – Donkeys were not! I cannot imagine how I would have responded had my dad come home from work one day and said; “Hey son, I got great news for you, I bought you your own Donkey”! Yikes, I would have been the laughingstock of my neighborhood (mostly farms). Donkeys always have had a bum rap – remember Don Quixote? He rode his gallant horse while his sidekick (squire) Sancho Panza rode a donkey. It seems like sidekicks always ride donkeys, while the dashing heroes ride horses – usually white ones. I think I recall Gene Autry’s sidekick (Pat Butram?) rode a donkey. It may have been a Mule, not sure on that one. By the way, speaking of Mules, here is a little “insider information” for you. A Mule is the offspring of a Male Donkey and a Female Horse. If the offspring of the Donkey and Horse is male, then it is always infertile. If it is a female, then it is generally infertile. There is such a thing as a “Hinny” (no snickering), it is the offspring of a Male Horse and a Female Donkey, but it is extremely rare. One other animal to mention and that is a Burro. A Burro is simply a small Donkey. Now, back to Donkeys, Donkeys seem rather funny looking because you always tend to compare them to Horses. Donkeys have longer ears, shorter manes, shorter hair on their tails and a dark black line down the middle of their backs.

So, I am guessing, if any of you out there had the choice to choose between a horse and a donkey, you would go for the horse. But wait a minute; I want you to think for a moment, of the place of donkeys in scripture as well as our Christian life. My wife Bev actually got me onto this one day, when during her quiet time, she asked me if I ever noticed the prominence of donkeys in scripture – I hadn’t, but she got me thinking, and eventually studying, the importance of donkeys in scripture and what that means to us. First of all, donkeys are mentioned a lot – a whole lot! They are mentioned 162 times in the Bible. Their mention in key passages is too numerous for this devotional. I will just “jog” your memory about a few (undoubtedly this will cause you to think of other ones). Abraham took his son Isaac to be sacrificed on Mount Moriah accompanied by a donkey. The Pagan Prophet Balaam was rebuked by his donkey. Silver coins and Joseph’s cup was found in the bags the donkeys were carrying when Joseph’s brother’s left Egypt. Saul was anointed king when he was looking for his father’s donkeys. Abigail came to David riding on a donkey when he was about to kill her husband Nabal. The Good Samaritan was riding his donkey when he helped the injured man. Samson killed the Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey. And of course, the most famous donkey incident was when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey in His Triumphal Entry.
As you can see, Donkeys play a key part in many significant Bible events (and I only gave you a few). So what is my point? It is this, God uses Donkeys! Okay, you probably did not want to hear that! But I am actually not meaning it the way it sounds, although, that in itself can be reassuring sometimes, when I wonder how God can use me. There is a place for donkeys and there is a place for horses (for a later devotional). But right now, during this lifetime, God wants us to “ride donkeys” (metaphorically speaking). In Deuteronomy 17, God gives the conditions for becoming a king, and believe it or not, one of those is to not acquire horses (see Deuteronomy 17:16). Later in the Old Testament, God rebukes Israel for not obeying Him in this manner (Isaiah 31:1). Now that you know this, look in scripture at all the times the Israelites are facing overwhelming odds – armies with horses, and they have only a few donkeys (you’ll be surprised how often that happened). The point is, God did not want the Israelites, or any king or judge, to trust in a horse. The horse was an amazingly powerful animal and a great fighter (see Job 39:19-25), any nation or army that had horses, had the advantage. But Israel was not to have them. How humbling that was! Can you imagine facing an army with charging horses and charioteers, and you have a few meek donkeys? No wonder King David pleased God when he said; “Some trust in chariots and some trust in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.” (Psalm 20:7)

Have you noticed that God delights to put you in positions of overwhelming odds? Have you noticed how often you feel like you are on a little donkey – perhaps even being ridiculed, while others around you are on their great steeds? It is God’s design, and we “chafe at the bit” (no pun intended), wishing we had horses. It is hard to be humbled and put in a place of dependence. But guess what, our Lord demonstrated to us the importance of this. When He should have been riding into Jerusalem on a large white stallion, He chose a donkey – actually, a donkey’s colt! He humbled Himself and trusted His Father. What a lesson for us! And you know what, one day; this meek and mild Jesus will come back, not on a donkey, but on a white horse! “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called faithful and true.” (Revelation 19:11) Jesus waited, His day came, ours will too. Right now we need to saddle up those donkeys, and ride in humility like our Master, letting the world know that we trust in God alone. But, cheer up, your horse riding days are coming; “The armies of heaven [you and me] were following him, riding on white horses.” (Revelation 19:14) So when our Heavenly Father says, “son – or daughter, I have a surprise for you, it’s a donkey”, we can say,” yes Lord, thank you, I ride it joyfully into the conflict.”