The Bible describes Moses as the most humble man on Earth. But there are moments in the scriptures, such as in Numbers 31:14-17, where Moses appears to act in a severe and harsh manner, even ordering the killing of people. This creates a theological question: how can the same person be described as humble while carrying out such harsh commands?

Let’s break this down with the relevant biblical context:

1. Moses’ Humility – God’s Testimony

Numbers 12:3 says:

> *“Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.”*

This passage directly describes Moses’ humility. It is important to note that this statement was made by God Himself, so it cannot be a lie or exaggeration. God’s word is always truthful. However, this leads to the question: how could Moses be humble and still be involved in actions that seem to contradict this humility?

2. Moses’ Early Life – Not Always Humble

Initially, Moses was not humble. He was a powerful and capable leader in Egypt, trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. Acts 7:22 provides insight into Moses’ early life:

> *“Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in words and deeds.”*

This shows that Moses, before his encounter with God, was a man of strength and influence, known for his speech and deeds. He wasn’t the humble shepherd we later read about. In fact, Exodus 2:11-15 shows that Moses killed an Egyptian man, which led him to flee from Egypt, demonstrating that his life was marked by pride and self-reliance at this point.

3. God’s Humbling of Moses

After fleeing Egypt, Moses spent forty years in Midian, tending to the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro. During this time, Moses was humbled. The pride and self-reliance that characterized his early life were stripped away as he learned to be a servant. This period

was crucial in preparing Moses for his role as the leader of Israel.

In Exodus 3:10, God speaks to Moses through the burning bush and commands him to go back to Egypt to free the Israelites. By this point, Moses had become a humble man, which is why he responded hesitantly, saying:

> *“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11).*

Moses’ humility was now evident in his recognition of his own weakness and limitations, and he sought God’s guidance rather than relying on his own strength.

4. The Question of Harsh Orders – The Case of Midian

The moment of tension arises in Numbers 31:14-17, where Moses gives the command to kill the Midianite women and children, seemingly contradicting his earlier humble nature.

In Numbers 31:14, Moses becomes angry with the officers of the

Israelite army when they return from battle:

> *“Moses was angry with the officers of the army, with the captains over thousands and captains over hundreds, who had come from the battle.”*

Why was Moses angry? Because, even though God had ordered them to destroy all of Midian (due to their role in leading Israel to sin, as seen in Numbers 25:1-3), the officers spared the women. Numbers 31:16 makes it clear that the women had been a direct cause of Israel’s sin:

> *“These are the women who caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord.”*

Moses’ anger was not out of personal vengeance, but because the soldiers had not fully obeyed God’s command to eliminate all the Midianites, including the women who had led Israel into sin.

Moses, despite his humility, was still fully committed to God’s justice and commands, even when they were harsh.

5. The Command to Kill – Divine Judgment

Moses’ actions in commanding the killing of the Midianites must be understood in light of divine judgment. Numbers 31:1-2 reveals that God gave Moses a direct command to avenge the Israelites against Midian for leading them into sin. This was not an arbitrary decision by Moses, but a fulfillment of God’s judgment upon the Midianites for their idolatry and corruption:

> *“The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Take vengeance on the Midianites for the children of Israel. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people.'”*

Moses, acting as God’s instrument, was carrying out this judgment. It is also important to recognize that in the context of ancient Israel, divine commands regarding judgment were often severe and were seen as necessary to purify the nation and prevent further sin.

6. Moses’ Humility in Obeying God’s Will

Despite his anger and the severity of his actions, Moses remained humble in his obedience to God. His humility was not about passively accepting everything; rather, it was about submitting to God’s will, no matter how difficult or uncomfortable. Moses understood that true humility is not simply a soft or passive demeanor, but an unwavering commitment to carry out God’s will, even when it involves difficult decisions.

In Numbers 31:17, Moses reiterates God’s command to the soldiers:

> *“Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man by lying with him.”*

Moses did not make these decisions lightly; they were carried out because they were part of God’s judgment against a sinful nation. Moses remained obedient to God’s command, not out of personal desire, but out of his role as a servant of God.

Conclusion: Humility and Obedience to God

Moses’ humility is not contradicted by his actions. Instead, it is demonstrated in his willingness to obey God, even in the most difficult circumstances. Humility, in biblical terms, does not mean avoiding tough decisions or actions, but rather submitting to God’s authority and carrying out His will. Moses’ humility was evident in his readiness to follow God’s commands, no matter the cost.

The lesson for us is clear: true humility is not just in how we act outwardly but in our heart’s willingness to obey God fully, even when His commands are difficult. We are called to follow God’s will, trusting in His wisdom, even when it challenges our understanding or comfort.

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