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INTERPRETATION OF I KINGS, CH. 19

After the explosion of nature in *17* and *20* and *28*, the Lord repeats the question to Elijah, asking him what he is doing there, and Elijah gives the same answer he gave previously -- as if he had learned nothing from the experience. Whereupon God tells him to go back to Damascus. What does all this mean?

First, note the similarity of Elijah to the experience of Moses; in both cases, the action takes place at Sinai; there is the theophany; 40 days and 40 nights; nestling in a cave; and, at the crucial moment, casting aside one's eyes and not looking.

My interpretation is that Elijah was a man of sudden appearance and dramatic action. When he emerged from the desert into civilization, he imagined that he could shock people by great spectacles and dramatic actions into doing the right thing and remaining on the right path. When his great confrontation with the Prophets of the Baal failed, even after he had apparently scored a triumph, he wanted to give up and wanted to die. ~~Th~~ God therefore passes before him the wind and the earthquake and the fire, and Elijah is made to realize that God is not in them. Only the sound of gentle stillness reveals the presence of the Creator. But Elijah failed to relate this to his own life. He failed to see that what God wants to tell him is that the great dramatic actions of tornadoes and earthquakes and conflagrations is not

adequate, that only in the still small voice, the sound of gentle stillness, can spiritual greatness be achieved. So when God asked him the same question and he showed that he has not learned the answer, that he has failed to make the connection between the symbolic events and his own experience, God tells him to go back to Damascus and there to involve himself in certain political and diplomatic activities.

Why so?

Because at the beginning of this chapter, Elijah was told to go to Beer Sheba, and now he is told to go to Syria. Note well that these two areas define the loci of Abraham's career -- who starts with Syria and makes his way to Beer Sheba. What we have, then, is a presentation of two historical archetypes, Moses and Abraham. Moses (during the first Sinaidic revelation) symbolizes the drama, power, spectacle that accompanies divine revelation. Abraham, however, experienced nothing as dramatic and spectacular, but with a man who heard the "sound of small stillness" when he was still in Syria and made his way, deliberately, carefully, including diplomatic and military actions, until he arrived in Beer Sheba and proclaimed the existence and worship of the one God in the land that would be his and his descendents.

In other words, by telling Elijah to go back to Damascus, God was reminding Elijah that not Moses but Abraham must henceforth become his model and paradigm.