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1KINGS 18: 1 After many days, the LORD's word came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab; and I will send rain on the earth."

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Elijah is commanded by the Lord to show himself to Ahab, 1Kgs 18:1, 1Kgs 18:2. Ahab, and Obadiah his steward, search the land to find provender for the cattle, Oba 1:3-6. Obadiah meets Elijah, who commands him to inform Ahab that he is ready to present himself before him, 1Kgs 18:7-15. Elijah and Ahab meet, 1Kgs 18:16-18. Elijah proposes that the four hundred and fifty priests of Baal should be gathered together at Mount Carmel; that they should offer a sacrifice to their god, and he to Jehovah; and the God who should send down fire to consume the sacrifice should be acknowledged as the true God, 1Kgs 18:19-24. The proposal is accepted, and the priests of Baal call in vain upon their god through the whole day, 1Kgs 18:25-29. Elijah offers his sacrifice, prays to Gods and fire comes down from heaven and consumes it; whereupon the people acknowledge Jehovah to be the true God, and slay all the prophets of Baal, 1Kgs 18:30-40. Elijah promises Ahab that there shall be immediate rain; it comes accordingly, and Ahab and Elijah come to Jezreel, 1Kgs 18:41-46.

#### Verse 1

After many days - in the third year - We learn from our Lord, Luk 4:25, that the drought which brought on the famine in Israel lasted three years and six months. St. James, Jam 5:17, gives it the same duration. Probably Elijah spent six months at the brook Cherith, and three years with the widow at Sarepta.

I will send rain upon the earth - The word האדמה haadamah should be translated the ground or the land, as it is probable that this drought did not extend beyond the land of Judea.

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1KINGS 18: 2 Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. The famine was severe in Samaria.

1KINGS 18: 3 Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly:

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#### Verse 3

Obadiah feared the Lord greatly - He was a sincere and zealous worshipper of the true God, and his conduct towards the persecuted prophets was the full proof both of his piety and humanity.

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1KINGS 18: 4 for it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took one hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.)

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#### Verse 4

Fed them with bread and water - By these are signified the necessaries of life, of whatsoever kind.

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1KINGS 18: 5 Ahab said to Obadiah, "Go through the land, to all the springs of water, and to all the brooks. Perhaps we may find grass and save the horses and mules alive, that we not lose all the animals."

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Verse 5

Unto all fountains of water - All marshy or well-watered districts, where grass was most likely to be preserved.

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1KINGS 18: 6 So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.

1KINGS 18: 7 As Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he recognised him, and fell on his face, and said, "Is it you, my lord Elijah?"

1KINGS 18: 8 He answered him, "It is I. Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here!'"

1KINGS 18: 9 He said, "Wherein have I sinned, that you would deliver your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me?"

1KINGS 18: 10 As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom, where my lord has not sent to seek you. When they said, 'He is not here,' he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they didn't find you.

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Verse 10

There is no nation or kingdom - He had sent through all his own states and to the neighboring governments to find out the prophet, as he knew, from his own declaration, that both rain and drought were to be the effect of his prayers. Had he found him, he no doubt intended to oblige him to procure rain, or punish him for having brought on this drought.

He took an oath - Ahab must have had considerable power and authority among the neighboring nations to require and exact this, and Elijah must have kept himself very secret to have shunned such an extensive and minute search.

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1KINGS 18: 11 Now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, "Behold, Elijah is here."'

1KINGS 18: 12 It will happen, as soon as I am gone from you, that the Spirit of the LORD will carry you I don't know where; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he can't find you, he will kill me. But I, your servant, have feared the LORD from my youth.

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Verse 12

The Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee - Obadiah supposed that the Spirit of the Lord had carried him to some strange country during the three years and a half of the drought; and as he had reason to think that Ahab would slay Elijah if he found him, and that the God of the prophet would not suffer

his servant to fall into such murderous hands, he took for granted that as soon as he should come into danger, so soon would the Spirit of the Lord carry him away, or direct him to some hiding place.

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1KINGS 18: 13 Wasn't it told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid one hundred men of the LORD's prophets with fifty to a cave, and fed them with bread and water?

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Verse 13

When Jezebel slew the prophets - This persecution was probably during the dearth, for as this bad woman would attribute the public calamity to Elijah, not being able to find him, she would naturally wreak her vengeance on the prophets of Jehovah who were within her reach.

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1KINGS 18: 14 Now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, "Behold, Elijah is here";' and he will kill me."

1KINGS 18: 15 Elijah said, "As the LORD of Armies lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today."

1KINGS 18: 16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

1KINGS 18: 17 When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"

1KINGS 18: 18 He answered, "I have not troubled Israel; but you, and your father's house, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and you have followed the Baals.

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Verse 18

I have not troubled Israel - Here the cause of the dearth is placed on its true ground: the king and the people had forsaken the true God, and God shut up the heavens that there was no rain. Elijah was only the minister whom God used to dispense this judgment.

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1KINGS 18: 19 Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel to Mount Carmel, and four hundred fifty of the prophets of Baal, and four hundred of the prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

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Verse 19

Gather to me all Israel - The heads of tribes and families; the rulers of the people.

The prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty - the prophets of the groves four hundred - The king and queen had different religious establishments; the king and his servants worshipped Baal, the supreme lord and master of the world, the sun. For this establishment four hundred and fifty priests were maintained. The queen and her women worshipped אֲשֵׁרָה Asherah, Astarte, or Venus; and for this establishment four hundred priests were maintained. These latter were in high honor; they ate at Jezebel's table; they made a part of her household. It appears that those eight hundred and fifty

priests were the domestic chaplains of the king and queen, and probably not all the priests that belonged to the rites of Baal and Asherah in the land; and yet from the following verse we learn that Ahab had sent to all the children of Israel to collect these prophets; but Jezebel had certainly four hundred of them in her own house who were not at the assembly mentioned here. Those of Baal might have a more extensive jurisdiction than those of Asherah, the latter being constantly resident in Samaria.

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1KINGS 18: 20 So Ahab sent to all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together to Mount Carmel.

1KINGS 18: 21 Elijah came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you waver between the two sides? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The people answered him not a word.

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#### Verse 21

How long halt ye between two opinions? - Literally, "How long hop ye about upon two boughs?" This is a metaphor taken from birds hopping about from bough to bough, not knowing on which to settle. Perhaps the idea of limping through lameness should not be overlooked. They were halt, they could not walk uprightly; they dreaded Jehovah, and therefore could not totally abandon him; they feared the king and queen, and therefore thought they must embrace the religion of the state. Their conscience forbade them to do the former; their fear of man persuaded them to do the latter, but in neither were they heartily engaged; and at this juncture their minds seemed in equipoise, and they were waiting for a favorable opportunity to make their decision. Such an opportunity now, through the mercy of God, presented itself.

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1KINGS 18: 22 Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred fifty men."

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#### Verse 22

I only, remain a prophet of the Lord - That is, I am the only prophet of God present, and can have but the influence of an individual; while the prophets of Baal are four hundred and fifty men! It appears that the queen's prophets, amounting to four hundred, were not at this great assembly; and these are they whom we meet with 1Kgs 22:6, and whom the king consulted relative to the battle at Ramoth-gilead.

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1KINGS 18: 23 Let them therefore give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, and put no fire under; and I will dress the other bull, and lay it on the wood, and put no fire under it.

1KINGS 18: 24 You call on the name of your god, and I will call on the LORD's name. The God who answers by fire, let him be God."

All the people answered, "It is well said."

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#### Verse 24

The God that answereth by fire - Elijah gave them every advantage when he granted that the God who answered by fire should be acknowledged as the true God; for as the Baal who was worshipped here was incontestably Apollo, or the sun, he was therefore the god of fire, and had only to work in his own element.

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1KINGS 18: 25 Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one bull for yourselves, and dress it first; for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it."

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#### Verse 25

For ye are many - And therefore shall have the preference, and the advantage of being first in your application to the deity.

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1KINGS 18: 26 They took the bull which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, "Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice, nor any who answered. They leaped about the altar which was made.

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#### Verse 26

From morning even until noon - It seems that the priests of Baal employed the whole day in their desperate rites. The time is divided into two periods:

1. From morning until noon; this was employed in preparing and offering the sacrifice, and in earnest supplication for the celestial fire. Still there was no answer, and at noon Elijah began to mock and ridicule them, and this excited them to commence anew. And,
2. They continued from noon till the time of offering the evening sacrifice, dancing up and down, cutting themselves with knives, mingling their own blood with their sacrifice, praying, supplicating, and acting in the most frantic manner.

And they leaped upon the altar - Perhaps it will be more correct to read with the margin, they leaped up and down at the altar; they danced round it with strange and hideous cries and gesticulations, tossing their heads to and fro, with a great variety of bodily contortions.

A heathen priest, a high priest of Budhoo, has been just showing me the manner in which they dance and jump up and down, and from side to side, twisting their bodies in all manner of ways, when making their offerings to their demon gods; a person all the while beating furiously on a tom-tom, or drum, to excite and sustain those frantic attitudes; at the same time imploring the succor of their god, frequently in some such language as this: "O loving brother devil, hear me, and receive my offering!" To perform these sacrificial attitudes they have persons who are taught to practice them from their earliest years, according to directions laid down in religious books; and to make the joints

and body pliant, much anointing of the parts and mechanical management are used; and they have masters, whose business it is to teach these attitudes and contortions according to the rules laid down in those books. It seems therefore that this was a very general practice of idolatry, as indeed are the others mentioned in this chapter.

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1KINGS 18: 27 At noon, Elijah mocked them, and said, "Cry aloud; for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he has gone aside, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he sleeps and must be awakened."

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Verse 27

At noon - Elijah mocked them - Had not Elijah been conscious of the Divine protection, he certainly would not have used such freedom of speech while encompassed by his enemies.

Cry aloud - Make a great noise; oblige him by your vociferations to attend to your suit.

For he is a god - הוא - כי אלהים הוא ki Elohim hu, he is the supreme God, you worship him as such, he must needs be such, and no doubt jealous of his own honor and the credit of his votaries! A strong irony.

He is talking - He may be giving audience to some others; let him know that he has other worshippers, and must not give too much of his attention to one. Perhaps the word שיח siach should be interpreted as in the margin, he meditateth; he is in a profound revery; he is making some god-like projects; he is considering how he may best keep up his credit in the nation. Shout! let him know that all is now at stake.

He is pursuing - He may be taking his pleasure in hunting, and may continue to pursue the game in heaven, till he have lost all his credit and reverence on earth. The original words, שיג לו sig lo, are variously translated; He is in a hotel, in diversorio, Vulgate. Perhaps he is delivering oracles, μη ποτε χρηματιζει αυτος, Septuagint. Or, he is on some special business. Therefore, cry aloud!

He is in a journey - He has left his audience chamber, and is making some excursions; call aloud to bring him back, as his all is at stake.

Peradventure he sleepeth - Rab. S. Jarchi gives this the most degrading meaning; I will give it in Latin, because it is too coarse to be put in English; Fortassis ad locum secretum abiit, ut ventrem ibi exomeret; "Perhaps he is gone to the \_\_\_\_." This certainly reduces Baal to the lowest degree of contempt, and with it the ridicule and sarcasm are complete.

Among Asiatic idolaters their gods have different functions to fulfill, and require sleep and rest. Vishnoo sleeps four months in the year. Budhoo is represented in his temple as sleep, though his eyes are open. Vayoo manages the winds; Varoona, the waters; Indra, the clouds, etc.; and according to many fables in the Pooranas, the gods are often out on journeys, expeditions, etc.

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1KINGS 18: 28 They cried aloud, and cut themselves in their way with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them.

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Verse 28

They cried aloud - The poor fools acted as they were bidden.

And cut themselves after their manner - This was done according to the rites of that barbarous religion; if the blood of the bullock would not move him they thought their own blood might; and with it they smeared themselves and their sacrifice. This was not only the custom of the idolatrous Israelites, but of the Syrians, Persians, Greeks, Indians, and in short of all the heathen world.

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1KINGS 18: 29 It was so, when midday was past, that they prophesied until the time of the offering of the offering; but there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any who regarded.

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#### Verse 29

They prophesied - They made incessant prayer and supplication; a farther proof that to pray or supplicate is the proper ideal meaning of the word נָבָא naba, which we constantly translate to prophesy, when even all the circumstances of the time and place are against such a meaning. See what is said on the case of Saul among the prophets, in the note on 1Sam 10:5 (note).

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1KINGS 18: 30 Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me"; and all the people came near to him. He repaired the altar of the LORD that was thrown down.

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#### Verse 30

He repaired the altar of the Lord - There had been an altar of Jehovah in that place, called, even among the heathens, the altar of Carmel, probably built in the time of the judges, or, as the rabbins imagine, by Saul. Tacitus and Suetonius mention an altar on Mount Carmel, which Vespasian went to consult; there was no temple nor statue, but simply an altar that was respectable for its antiquity. "Est Judaeam inter Syriamque Carmelus; ita vocant montem Deumque: nec simulachrum Deo, aut templum situm tradidere majores: aram tantum, et reverentiam." - Tacit. Hist. lib. ii., c. 78. A priest named Basilides officiated at that altar, and assured Vespasian that all his projects would be crowned with success.

Suetonius speaks to this purpose: "Apud Judaeam Carmeli Dei oraculum consulentem ita confirmavere sortes, ut quicquid cogitaret voveretque animo quamlibet magnum, id esse proventurum pollicerentur." Suet. in Vespas. cap. 5. The mount, the absence of a temple, no image, but a simple altar, very ancient, and which was held in reverence on account of the true answers which had been given there, prove that this was originally the altar of Jehovah: though in the time of Vespasian it seems to have been occupied by a heathen priest, and devoted to lying vanities.

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1KINGS 18: 31 Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the LORD's word came, saying, "Israel shall be your name."

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#### Verse 31

Took twelve stones - He did this to show that all the twelve tribes of Israel should be joined in the worship of Jehovah.

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1KINGS 18: 32 With the stones he built an altar in the LORD's name. He made a trench around the altar, large enough to contain two measures of seed.

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Verse 32

He made a trench - This was to detain the water that might fall down from the altar when the barrels should be poured upon it, 1Kgs 18:35.

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1KINGS 18: 33 He put the wood in order, and cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood. He said, "Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the burnt offering, and on the wood."

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Verse 33

Fill four barrels - This was done to prevent any kind of suspicion that there was fire concealed under the altar. An ancient writer under the name of Chrysostom, quoted by Calmet, says that he had seen under the altars of the heathens, holes dug in the earth with funnels proceeding from them, and communicating with openings on the tops of the altars. In the former the priests concealed fire, which, communicating through the funnels with the holes, set fire to the wood and consumed the sacrifice; and thus the simple people were led to believe that the sacrifice was consumed by a miraculous fire. Elijah showed that no such knavery could be practiced in the present case. Had there been a concealed fire under the altar, as in the case mentioned above, the water that was thrown on the altar must have extinguished it most effectually. This very precaution has for ever put this miracle beyond the reach of suspicion.

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1KINGS 18: 34 He said, "Do it a second time"; and they did it the second time. He said, "Do it a third time"; and they did it the third time.

1KINGS 18: 35 The water ran around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water.

1KINGS 18: 36 At the time of the offering of the offering, Elijah the prophet came near, and said, "LORD, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word."

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Verse 36

Lord God of Abraham - He thus addressed the Supreme Being, that they might know when the answer was given, that it was the same God whom the patriarchs and their fathers worshipped, and thus have their hearts turned back again to the true religion of their ancestors.

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1KINGS 18: 37 Hear me, LORD, hear me, that this people may know that you, LORD, are God, and that you have turned their heart back again.”

1KINGS 18: 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

#### Verse 38

Then the fire of the Lord fell - It did not burst out from the altar; this might still, notwithstanding the water, have afforded some ground for suspicion that fire had been concealed, after the manner of the heathens, under the altar.

Pindar's account of the Rhodians' settling is the isle of Rhodes, and their first sacrifice there, bears a near affinity to the account here given: the shower of gold descending on the sacrifice offered up without fire, to show the approbation of their god, is little more than a poetic account of the above transactions. Καιτοι γαρ αιθουσας εχοντες Σπερμ' ανεβαν φλογος ου Τευξαν δ' απυροις ιεροις Αλσος εν ακροπολει· κεινοισι μεν ξαν - θαν αγαγων νεφελαι· Πολυν υσε χρυσον

Pind. Olymp. Od. 7, ver. 86.

The Rhodians, mindful of their sire's behest,

Straight in the citadel an altar reared;

But with imperfect rites the Power addressed,

And without fire their sacrifice prepared;

Yet Jove, approving, o'er the assembly spread

A yellow cloud, that dropped with golden dews.

West.

Consumed the burnt-sacrifice - The process of this consumption is very remarkable, and all calculated to remove the possibility of a suspicion that there was any concealed fire.

1. The fire came down from heaven.
2. The pieces of the sacrifice were first consumed.
3. The wood next, to show that it was not even by means of the wood that the flesh was burned.
4. The twelve stones were also consumed, to show that it was no common fire, but one whose agency nothing could resist.
5. The dust, the earth of which the altar was constructed, was burned up.
6. The water that was in the trench was, by the action of this fire, entirely evaporated.
7. The action of this fire was in every case downward, contrary to the nature of all earthly and material fire. Nothing can be more simple and artless than this description, yet how amazingly full and satisfactory is the whole account!

1KINGS 18: 39 When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces. They said, "The LORD, he is God! the LORD, he is God!"

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Verse 39

Fell on their faces - Struck with awe and reverence at the sight of this incontestable miracle.

And they said - We should translate the words thus: Jehovah, He is the God! Jehovah, He is the God! Baal is not the God; Jehovah alone is the God of Israel.

As our term Lord is very equivocal, we should every where insert the original word יהוה, which we should write Yeve or Yeheveh, or Yahvah or Yehueh, or, according to the points, Yehovah.

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1KINGS 18: 40 Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal! Don't let one of them escape!" They seized them. Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and killed them there.

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Verse 40

Let not one of them escape - They had committed the highest crime against the state and the people by introducing idolatry, and bringing down God's judgments upon the land; therefore their lives were forfeited to that law which had ordered every idolater to be slain. It seems also that Ahab, who was present, consented to this act of impartial justice.

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1KINGS 18: 41 Elijah said to Ahab, "Get up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain."

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Verse 41

Get thee up, eat and drink - It appears most evidently that Ahab and the prophet were now on good terms, and this is a farther evidence that the slaying of the false prophets was by the king's consent.

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1KINGS 18: 42 So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he bowed himself down on the earth, and put his face between his knees.

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Verse 42

Put his face between his knees - He kneeled down, and then bowed his head to the earth, so that, while his face was between his knees, his forehead touched the ground.

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1KINGS 18: 43 He said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." He went up, and looked, and said, "There is nothing." He said, "Go again" seven times.

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 Verse 43

Look toward the sea - From the top of Mount Carmel the Mediterranean Sea was full in view.

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1KINGS 18: 44 On the seventh time, he said, "Behold, a small cloud, like a man's hand, is rising out of the sea." He said, "Go up, tell Ahab, 'Get ready and go down, so that the rain doesn't stop you.'"

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## Verse 44

There ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. - כִּכְּפַיִשׁ kechaph ish, like the hollow of a man's hand. In the form of the hand bent, the concave side downmost. I have witnessed a resemblance of this kind at sea previously to a violent storm, a little cloud the size of a man's hand first appearing, and this increasing in size and density every moment, till at last it covered the whole heavens, and then burst forth with incredible fury.

Mr. Bruce mentions a similar appearance in Abyssinia: - "Every morning, in Abyssinia, is clear, and the sun shines. About nine a small cloud, not above four hundred feet broad, appears in the east, whirling violently round, as if upon an axis; but arrived near the zenith, it first abates its motion, then loses its form, and extends itself greatly, and seems to call up vapours from all opposite quarters. These clouds, having attained nearly the same height, rush against each other with great violence, and put me always in mind of Elijah foretelling rain on Mount Carmel." - Travels, vol. v., page 336, edit. 1806.

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1KINGS 18: 45 In a little while, the sky grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel.

1KINGS 18: 46 The hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he tucked his cloak into his belt and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

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## Verse 46

Ran before Ahab - Many think that Elijah ran before the king in order to do him honor; and much learned labor has been spent on this passage in order to show that Elijah had put himself at the head of a company of chanters who ran before the king reciting his praises, or the praises of God; a custom which still exists in Arabian countries! I believe all these entirely mistake the writer's meaning: Ahab yoked his chariot, and made all speed to Jezreel. The hand of the Lord, or, as the Targum says, the spirit of strength, came upon Elijah, and he girded up his loins, that is, tucked up his long garments in his girdle, and ran; and notwithstanding the advantage the king had by means of his chariot, the prophet reached Jezreel before him. There is no intimation here that he ran before the horses' heads. All this was intended to show that he was under the peculiar influence and inspiration of the Almighty, that the king might respect and fear him, and not do or permit to be done to him any kind of outrage.