Worksheet on Biblical allusions in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell

To do this assignment, you will need access to a Bible; I recommend a King James version, but you can use any version you like. MHH uses the Bible in many ways: it draws on Biblical figures, narratives, and values, sometimes representing them straightforwardly, sometimes representing them satirically or in a way that transvalues them. The questions that follow will focus on just two references in MHH plate 24: the reference to Elijah, and the image at the bottom of the plate.

1. The "Memorable Fancy" that begins on plate 22 records a dialogue between an angel and a devil. At the end of this narrative the angel arises as Elijah. Read the first two chapters of the Second Book of Kings. Given what you learn of Elijah, why might it make sense for Blake to refer to him at this moment? (Provide at least 2 "facts" about Elijah that can be related to the themes of MHH.)

2. Elijah is mentioned again in John 1:21. With whom is he linked there? What does this connection contribute to your understanding of his function in MHH?

3. Look now at the crawling man at the bottom of plate 24. It is generally assumed that this is a figure of Nebuchadnezzar. To understand this image, read Daniel, chapter 4. Which moment in the Biblical narrative does Blake's image dramatize?

4. Think now about the moral lessons or themes embodied in the narrative of Nebuchadnezzar. What is the overall lesson of the chapter as it appears in the Bible?

We have seen in class that Blake often uses Biblical narratives or figures in various ways, often suggesting several meanings--sometimes even contrary meanings--at one time. Bearing this in mind, think about the allusion to Nebuchadnezzar in the three following contexts.

5a. How would you relate Blake's image to the moral lesson or theme of his "Memorable Fancy"?

5b. How would you relate the image to the line that runs underneath it: "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression"?

5c. How would you relate the image to the characters or themes of the "Song of Liberty" that follows?