

## Miller's Rules of Bible Interpretation\*

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In studying the Bible, I have found the following rules to be of great service to myself, and now give them to the public by special request. Every rule should be well studied, in connection with the Scripture references, if the Bible student would be at all benefitted by them.

1. All Scripture is necessary, and may be understood by diligent application and study (2 Timothy 3:15-17).
2. Every word must have it's proper bearing on the subject presented in the Bible (Matthew 5:18).
3. Scripture must be it's own expositor, since it is a rule of itself. If I depend on a teacher to explain it to me, and he should guess at it's meaning, or desire to have it so on account of his sectarian creed, or to be thought wise, then his *guessing, desire, creed, or wisdom* is my rule, not the Bible (Psalm 19:7-11; 119:97-105; Matthew 23:8-10; 1 Corinthians 2:12-16; Ezekiel 34:18, 19; Luke 11:52; Malachi 2:7, 8).
4. To understand doctrine, bring all the Scriptures together on the subject you wish to know; then let every word have it's proper influence, and if you can form your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in an error (Isaiah 28:7-29; 35:8; Proverbs 19:27; Luke 24:27, 44, 45; James 5:19; 2 Peter 1:19, 20).
5. God has revealed things to come, by visions, in figures and parables; and in this way the same things are oftentimes revealed again and again, by different visions, or in different figures and parables. If you wish to understand them, you must combine them all in one (Psalm 89:19; Hosea 12:10; Habakkuk 2:2; Acts 2:17; 1 Corinthians 10:6; Hebrews 9:9, 24; Psalm 78:2; Matthew 13:13, 34; Genesis 41:1-32; Daniel 2, 7, 8; Acts 10:9-16).

6. Visions are always mentioned as such (2 Corinthians 12:1).
7. How to know when a word is used figuratively. If it makes good sense as it stands, and does no violence to the simple laws of nature, then it must be understood literally; if not, figuratively (Revelation 12:1, 2; 17:3-7).
8. Figures always have a figurative meaning, and are used much in prophecy to represent future things, times, and events; such as *mountains*, meaning *governments*; *beasts*, meaning *kingdoms*

*Waters*, meaning *people*

*Lamp*, meaning *Word of God*.

*Day*, meaning *year*.

(Daniel 2:35, 44; 7:8, 17; Revelation 17:1, 15; Psalm 119:105; Ezekiel 4:6).

9. To learn the true meaning of figures, trace your figurative word through the Bible, and, where you find it explained, put it on your figure, and if it makes good sense, you need look no further; if not, look again.
10. Figures sometimes have two or more different significations; as day is used in a figurative sense to represent three different periods of time.

1. Indefinite.

2. Definite, a day for a year.

3. Day for a thousand years

(Ecclesiastes 7:14; Ezekiel 4:6; 2 Peter 3:8).

11. Parables are used as comparisons to illustrate subjects, and must be explained in the same way as figures, by the subject and Bible (Mark 4:13).
12. To know whether we have the true historical event for the fulfillment of a prophecy. If you find every word of the prophecy (after the figures are understood) is literally fulfilled, then you may know that your history is the true event. But if one word lacks a fulfillment, then you must look for another event, or wait its future development. For God takes care that history and prophecy doth agree, so that the true, believing children of God may never be ashamed (Psalm 21:5; Isaiah 14:17-19; 1 Peter 2:6; Revelation 17:17; Acts 3:18).
13. The most important rule of all is, that you must have *faith*. It must be a faith that requires a sacrifice, and, if tried, would give up the dearest object on earth, the world and all its desires, character, living, occupation, friends, home, comforts, and worldly honors. If any of these should hinder our believing any part of God's word, it would show our faith to be vain. Nor can we believe, so long as one of these motives lies lurking in our hearts. We must believe that God will never forfeit His word. And we can have confidence that He that takes notice of the sparrow, and numbers the hairs of our head, will guard the translation of His own word, and throw a barrier around it, and prevent those who sincerely trust in God, and put implicit confidence in His word, from erring far from the truth, though they may not understand Hebrew or Greek.

\* *Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology Selected From Manuscripts of William Miller*, 1841, ed. Joshua V. Himes. pp. 20-24.

## Additional Notes From the Spirit of Prophecy

Though many abandoned their former reckoning of the prophetic periods and denied the correctness of the movement based thereon, others were unwilling to renounce points of faith and experience that were sustained by the Scriptures and by the witness of the Spirit of God. They believed that they had adopted sound principles of interpretation in their study of the prophecies, and that it was their duty to hold fast the truths already gained, and to continue the same course of Biblical research. With earnest prayer they reviewed their position and studied the Scriptures to discover their mistake. As they could see no error in their reckoning of the prophetic periods, they were led to examine more closely the subject of the sanctuary (*The Great Controversy*, p. 411).

The Bible with its precious gems of truth was not written for the scholar alone. On the contrary, it was designed for the people; and the interpretation given by the common people, when aided by the Holy Spirit, accords best with the truth as it is in Jesus (*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 330, 331).

Those who are engaged in proclaiming the third angel's message are searching the Scriptures upon the same plan that Father Miller adopted. In the little book entitled *Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology*, Father Miller gives the following simple but intelligent and important rules for Bible study and interpretation (*Review and Herald*, November 25, 1884).

He who rests satisfied with his own present imperfect knowledge of the Scriptures, thinking this sufficient for his salvation, is resting in a fatal deception. There are many who are not thoroughly furnished with Scriptural arguments, that they may be able to discern error, and condemn all the tradition and superstition that has been palmed off as truth . . . . If we would understand the way of salvation, if we would see the beams of the Sun of righteousness, we must study the Scriptures for a purpose, for the promises and prophecies of the Bible shed clear beams of glory upon the divine plan of redemption, which grand truths are not clearly comprehended (*The 1888 Materials*, pp. 403, 404).

The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen (*Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 21).