

Miller's Rules of Interpretation
William Miller's rules to prophetic study.

RULES OF INTERPRETATION

William Miller

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 benefited by them.

RULE I—Every word must have its proper bearing on the subject presented in the Bible.

PROOF: Matthew 5:18.

RULE II—All Scripture is necessary and may be understood by a diligent application and study.

PROOF: 2 Timothy 3:15–17.

RULE III—Nothing revealed in the Scripture can or will be hid from those who ask in faith, not wavering.

PROOF: Deuteronomy 29:29; Matthew 10:26–27; 1 Corinthians 2:10; Philippians 3:15; Isaiah 44:11; Matthew 21:22; John 14:13–4; 15:7; James 1:5–6; 1 John 5:13–15.

RULE IV—To understand doctrine, bring all the scriptures together on the subject you wish to know, then let every word have its proper influence, and if you can form your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in an error.

PROOF: Isaiah 28:7–29; 35:8; Proverbs 19:27; Luke 24:27, 44–45; Romans 16:26; James 5:19; 2 Peter 1:19, 29.

RULE V—Scripture must be—its own expositor, since it is a rule of itself. If I depend on a teacher to expound it to me and he should, guess at its 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.

PROOF: 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.

RULE VI—God has revealed things to come, by visions, in figures and parables, and in this way the same things are often time 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.

PROOF: Psalm 89:19; Hosea 12:10; Habakkuk 2:2; Acts 2:17; 1 Corinthians 5:6; Hebrews 9:9, 24; Psalm 78:2; Matthew 13:13, 34; Genesis 41:1–32; Daniel 2, 7, 8; Acts 10:9–16.

RULE VII—Visions are always mentioned as such.

PROOF: 2 Corinthians 12:1.

RULE VIII—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.

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

RULE IX—Parables are used as companions to illustrate subjects, and must be explained in the same way as figures by the subject and Bible. Mark 4:13.

See also; the explanation of the ten virgins: *Miller's Lectures*, Number 16.

RULE X—Figures sometimes have two or more different significations, as day is used in a figurative sense to represent three different periods of time.

PROOF: Ecclesiastes 7:14.

1. Indefinite.
2. Definite, a day for a year.
3. Day for a thousand years.

If you put on the right construction it will harmonize with the Bible and make good sense, otherwise it will not.

PROOF: Ezekiel 4:6; 2 Peter 3:8.

RULE XI—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

PROOF: Revelation 12:1–2; 17:3–7.

RULE XII—To learn the true meaning of figures, trace your figurative word through your 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.

RULE XIII—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.

PROOF: Psalm 22:5; Isaiah 45:17–19; 1 Peter 2:6; Revelation 17:17; Acts 3:18.

RULE XIV—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 ever 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.

These are some of the most important rules which I find the word of God warrants me to adopt and follow, in order for system and regularity. And if I am not greatly deceived, in so doing, I have found the Bible, as a whole, one of the most simple, plain, and intelligible books ever written, containing proof in itself of its divine origin and full of all knowledge that our hearts could wish to know or enjoy. I have found it a treasure which the world cannot purchase. It gives a calm peace in believing, and a firm hope in the future. It sustains the mind in adversity, and teaches us to be humble in prosperity. It prepares us to love and do good to others, and to realize the value of the soul. It makes us bold and valiant for the truth, and nerves the arm to oppose error. It gives us a powerful weapon to break down infidelity, and makes known the only antidote for sin. It instructs us how death will be conquered, and how the bonds of the tomb must be broken. It tells us of future events, and shows the preparation necessary to meet them. It gives us an opportunity to hold conversation with the King of kings, and reveals the best code of laws ever enacted. This is but a faint view of its value; yet how many perishing souls treat it with neglect, or, what is equally as bad, treat it as a hidden mystery which cannot be known.

Oh my dear reader, make it your chief study. Try it well, and you will find it to be all I have said. Yes, like the Queen of Sheba, you will say the half was not told you. The divinity taught in our schools is always founded on some sectarian creed. It may do to take a blank mind and impress it with this kind, but it will always end in bigotry. A free mind will never be satisfied with the views of others. Were I a teacher of youth in divinity, I would first learn their capacity and mind. If these were good, I would make them study the Bible for themselves, and send them out free to do the world good. But if they had no mind, I would stamp them with another’s mind, write bigot on their forehead, and send them out as slaves.

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