

THE BIBLE AS THE WORD OF GOD

William Miller's Rules

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9 min read



William Miller's rules of interpretation are sound principles of Bible study that lead to the truth based on the Word of God.

Have you ever heard that Scripture interprets Scripture or that the Bible is its own interpreter? What does this mean?

The Holy Spirit is the Author of the Bible. Peter tells us this plainly in these words,

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. 2 Peter 1:21

And while some may teach that the Bible cannot be understood by everyone but by experts only, the Bible is clear that God has given us His Word to reveal His will and disclose His counsel to us.

Paul explains the practical purpose God intended the Bible to have in our lives.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

It's clear from these verses that the Bible is to be read, understood, and applied. While God does not share all His vast knowledge with us, we're assured that it is His desire to keep us informed. With this revealed knowledge, comes a responsibility to share it with others, especially our own families.

Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets. Amos 3:7

The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. Deuteronomy 29:29

Considering that God wants us to understand His will as it is revealed in the Bible, shouldn't we expect that He would provide a clear method for Bible study and interpretation within the Bible itself? In fact, He does. God has included a number of rules right in Scripture to guide us in our study. These rules, gathered together and published by William Miller, reveal how Scripture interprets itself.

William Miller (1782-1849) was a preacher and diligent Bible student. He compiled a list of Bible study rules straight from the Bible and added others in keeping with these principles. Many serious Bible students have since benefited from having these rules in writing.

*"That we may proceed intelligently, ...I shall give an extract or two from Mr. Miller's rules of interpretation, **which are substantially those of every judicious interpreter of the word of God.**" James White ¹*

The way we study the Bible must be methodical. We cannot base a doctrine upon one verse. The Bible itself suggests that its words be studied "line upon line, precept upon precept," in other words, comparing Scripture with Scripture and precept with precept, for the Bible never contradicts itself, and we should use the weight of evidence to prove any concept. If there are verses that seem to contradict, then they must be understood in light of the other verses upon that subject. Miller himself suggests this methodology in his commentary for Rule 5. He believed that all parts of Scripture were necessary, that no word was used without purpose or significance, and that Scripture could be understood by diligent application and study. (2 Tim 3:15-17)

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... **in our study of the Bible we shall all do well to heed the principles set forth.** ²

Using Miller's rules today is still a good idea as the rules are timeless. Here are Miller's rules in his own words.

William Miller's Rules of Bible Interpretation

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. [Matthew 5:18](#)

RULE II.

All Scripture is necessary, and may be understood by a diligent application and study. [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. [Deuteronomy 29:29](#); [Matthew 10:26-27](#); [1 Corinthians 2:10](#); [Philippians 3:15](#); [Isaiah 45:11](#); [Matthew 21:22](#); [John 14:13](#); [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 error. [Isaiah 28:7-29](#); [Isaiah 25:8](#); [Isaiah 35:8](#); [Proverbs 19:27](#); [Luke 24:27,44-45](#); [Romans 16:26](#); [James 5:19](#); [2 Peter 1:19-20](#)

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. [Psalm 19:7-11](#); [Psalm 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 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, chapters [2](#), [7](#) & [8](#); [Acts 10:9-16](#)

RULE VII.

Visions are always mentioned as such. [2 Corinthians 12:1](#); [Acts 10:9-16](#); [11:5](#); [Daniel 4:10](#); [8:2](#); [9:21](#); [10:8](#).

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 ([Daniel 2:35,44](#)); beasts, meaning kingdoms ([Daniel 7:8,17](#)); waters, meaning people ([Rev 17:1,15](#)); lamp, meaning Word of God ([Ps 119:105](#)); day, meaning year ([Ezek 4:6](#)).

RULE IX.

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](#)

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.

1. Indefinite. [Ecclesiastes 7:14](#)
2. Definite, a day for a year. [Ezekiel 4:6](#)
3. Day for a thousand years. [2 Peter 3:8](#)

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

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. [Revelation 12:1-2](#); [Revelation 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 for 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 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.

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