

Principles When Studying the Bible & Prophecy

Bible & Bible Prophecy Literary Devices & Methods

William Miller's 14 Rules of 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. “

- 1. Every word must have its proper bearing on the subject presented in the Bible. Matthew 5:18**
- 2. All Scripture is necessary, and may be understood by diligent application and study. 2 Timothy 3:15,16,17**
- 3. 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 44:11; Matthew 21:22; John 14:13, 14; 15:7; James 1:5, 6; 1 John 5:13, 14, 15.**
- 4. 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. Isaiah 28:7-29; 35:8; Proverbs 19:27; Luke 24:27,44,45; Romans 16:26; James 5:19; 2 Pet. 1:19,20**
- 5. 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. Psalms 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**
- 6. God has revealed things to come, by visions, in figures and parables, and in this way the same things are often times 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. Psalms 89:19; Hosea 12:10; Habakkuk 2:2; Acts 2:17; 1 Corinthians 10:6; Hebrews 9:9, 24; Psalms 78:2; Matthew 8:13, 34; Genesis 41:1-32; Daniel 2; 7; 8; Acts 10:9-16**

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7. Visions are always mentioned as such. 2 Corinthians 12:1
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, lamps, meaning Word of God, day, meaning year. Daniel 2:35,44; 7:8,17; Revelation 17:1,15; Psalms 119:105; Ezekiel 4:6
9. Parables are used as comparison to illustrate subjects, and must be explained in the same way as figures, by the subject and Bible. Mark 4:13
10. Figures sometimes have two or more different significations; as day is used in a figurative sense to represent three different periods of time.
 - Definite, a day for a year
 - Day for a thousand years
 - IndefiniteIf you put on the right construction it will harmonize with the Bible and make good sense, otherwise it will not. Ecclesiastes 7:14; Ezekiel 4:6; 2 Peter 3:8
11. 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
12. 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.

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- 13. 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. Psalms 21:5; Isaiah 14:17-19; 1 Peter 2:6; Revelation 17:17; Acts 3:18**
- 14. 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 Gods 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**

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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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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! -- {Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology, 20-24}

Inspiration's Endorsement of William Miller's 14 Rules

“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.... The above is a portion of these rules; and in our study of the Bible we shall all do well to heed the principles set forth.” -- {Review and Herald, November 25, 1884}

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Repeat & Enlarge:

When God wants to reveal a critical truth in bible prophecy, He will repeat the matter ($\geq 2x$) using different imagery or symbols. With each repetition, additional details are provided that enlarge upon the understanding of the established truth.

Types & Antitypes:

Types are symbols for, or representations of an object. For example, every lamb, bull, goat or dove sacrificed was a “type” of Christ. Jesus is the antitype, or actual object. The terms “figure”, “shadow”, “pattern” and “example” often signify types are being employed in the bible text.

Summary Followed by Detail:

Often the bible will provide the complete summary of an event and immediately follow with the details of the event. The Creation Story is summarized in the first verse of Genesis and expounded upon in the following two chapters. (Ex: Genesis 1, 2; Leviticus 16; Daniel 9:24-27)

Symbols & Imagery:

The bible uses the techniques of imagery and symbolism to represent different themes or motifs. God provided imagery and symbolism in the bible for the following reasons:

- Similar to parables, imagery helps the reader better understand and relate to the specified theme
- To weed-out the casual reader for the more diligent student who hungers and thirsts for righteousness (Mark 4:9-12)
- To protect the writing from intentional tampering and modification

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Line-upon-Line, Precept-upon-Precept (Isaiah 28:9-13)

God gives specific counsel by which His Holy Word, the Bible, should be studied. Again, not pleased with the casual reader, God seeks those who will “diligently seek Him” Hebrews 11: 6. Therefore, the student of the bible must compare line-by-line, and scripture by scripture in order to understand precepts (doctrinal teachings) and principles when drawing conclusions for God’s Word. This method of bible study and understanding is called *proof-texting*.

Upon the Testimony of Two or Three Witnesses (2 Cor 13:1; Matt 18:16)

God instructs that only after two or more witnesses are produced, bearing the exact same testimony, could a person be charged with a crime under the Jewish system of government (Deuteronomy 17:6). Similarly with God’s Word, only with the testimony of two or more scriptures can a teaching, precept (doctrine), or principle be established as truth when reading the bible (Genesis 41:1-32; Deut 17:2-7).

Light is Progressive (1 Corinthians 3:10-13; Proverbs 4:18)

God shines forth the light of truth in a gradual and progressive manner such that light builds upon light (Proverbs 4:18). Never should *new light* contradict foundational truths (Isaiah 58:11, 12) but should compliment and build upon the established truths (2 Peter 1:19). We are to walk in the light while we have the light, lest darkness come upon us (John 12:35, 36)

The Natural is Followed by the Spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:45, 46)

The bible offers natural or literal people, figures, events and situations that serve as object lessons, allegories, types and symbols for spiritual application for the end times (1 Cor 10:1-11) [i.e. Literal Adam/Spiritual Adam; Literal Egypt/Spiritual Egypt; Literal Israel/Spiritual Israel; Literal Babylon/Spiritual Babylon; Earthly Sanctuary/Heavenly Sanctuary]. Understanding and discernment of these truths is given by inspiration of God (1 Cor 2:6-14; John 4:22-24)

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Written for Our Admonition... Ends of the World (1 Cor. 10:1-11)

The writings and admonitions of the bible prophets, notwithstanding specific predictions relative to their time, were written especially for those upon whom the ends of the age have come. All of the bible prophets who wrote within the canonical 66 books of the bible have made predictions for the end times and/or their prophecies serve as allusions to current or future events

1 Literal Year for 1 Prophetic Day (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:4-6)

In understanding prophetic time, God at times appoints a prophetic day to signify a literal year. As with the Hebrew spies who surveyed the land of Canaan for 40-days, the Children of Israel would remain in the wilderness for 40-years (1 generation) because of their rebellion against God. Further, in conveying a message to His prophets, God often used the life of the prophet to be an object lesson to the people who are to receive the message. Ezekiel was told to lay on his side for 390 days, signifying the 390 years of captivity appointed for the people of God. (See also Gen 29:27, 28; Exodus 23:10-12)

Present Truth (Gospel) Message

God assures us that He will bring about no [great] thing without revealing a knowledge of the thing to His prophets (Amos 3:7). Further, out of love and compassion, God repeats the message, providing an early message and a *Present Truth Message*. The early message is to bring reformation to prepare for the coming event. The Present Truth Message is a life or death conveying of the same message that has both temporal and eternal consequences. Below are examples of the giving of early and Present Truth messages in scripture:

- | | |
|---|---|
| • Enoch/Methuselah (early messengers) | Noah (present truth messenger) |
| • Lot (early messenger) | Angels of God (present truth messengers) |
| • Moses (early messenger) | Isaiah/Jeremiah/Ezekiel (present truth messenger) |
| • Moses/David/Isaiah (early messengers) | John the Baptist (present truth messenger) |
| • All the prophets (early messengers) | the last-day Remnant (present truth messengers) |

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4:3 Pattern

Definitive patterns can be seen when reading and understanding bible prophecy. The pattern of 4 followed by 3 is seen in the following occurrences:

There are 7 seals mentioned in the book of Revelation

- 4 of the seven seals are identified as horses (Revelation 6:1-8)
- 3 of the seals are experiences
- 4 times John is commanded to “Come and See” as the seals are opened
- 3 times John is merely shown the events associated with the seal

There are 7 trumpets mentioned in the book of Revelation

- 4 of the seven trumpets are given as trumpets (messages)
- 3 of the seven trumpets are associated with the 3-Woes, “Woe, Woe, Woe”



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Triple Application of Prophecy

The bible affirms that there is nothing new under the sun and the Lord has made known to men last day events in light of past prophetic revelation (Ecclesiastes 3:15). Prophetic truths are at times made known in triplet sets where the first two occurrences of a truth provides light for the fulfillment of the third event or mathematically : event 1 + event 2 = event 3. The Triple application of prophecy is seen in the experiences or references to the following and are established on the testimony of 2 or more witnesses:

- Three Elijah's (Elijah, John the Baptist, God's Remnant Church)
- Three Rome's (Pagan, Papal, Modern)
- Three persecutors in the time of Christ (Greek, Hebrew, Latin)
- Three "Woes"
- Three Abominations
- Three pair of Sanctuary Cleansings (Christ 's Time, Millerite History, End Time)

Historical and Biblical Counsels Repeat (Ecclesiastes 1:9, 3:15)

The work of God in the earth presents, from age to age, a striking similarity in every great reformation or religious movement. The principles of God's dealing with men are ever the same. The important movements of the present have their parallel in those of the past, and the experience of the church in former ages has lessons of great value for our own time. {The Great Controversy, 343.1}

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Jesus Declares the End from the Beginning (Isaiah 46:9, 10)

As we trace the history of nations and God's people, we can see that their end directly parallels the theme of their beginnings. This fact is clearly seen in the Reform Line histories of Ancient Israel, from its beginnings at the Exodus and at the end of Ancient Israel with the birth of Jesus Christ, culminating with the conclusion of the 490-year prophecy of Daniel 9. The same prophetic truths can be said of Modern Israel, at its reformatory beginnings with the Millerite Movement and at its conclusion with the history of the 144,000.

Chiastic Structure of the Bible and History

A corollary to the above truth, that Jesus declares the end from the beginning, is the detailed structure of a chiasm seen throughout Scripture and in History. A chiasm is a structure that is composed of mirror image reflections, as two legs of an isosceles triangle or as in the following Scriptural example:

"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Mark 2:27

Using the ABBA structure (Sabbath=A, man= B) we see a chiasm is presented. This structure, coupled with the above Scriptural fact of Jesus declaring the end from the beginning, opens up lines of truth and understanding that otherwise could not be understood, presenting chiastic reform line histories.

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Internal vs. External Prophetic Revelation

The Book of the Revelation exemplifies God's wisdom and power overall of the creation. The Revelation shows the internal struggles that would exist within God's Church, the Bride of Christ through the ages as well as the external influences that would war against His Church. Christ is seen in the Revelation chapters 1-3, walking in the midst of the **Seven Churches**, a representation of seven eras of church history that all cumulatively typify the experience of God's last day church. Here is shown the internal struggles of the church to maintain its first love to Jesus Christ, to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, to be found with Christ's righteousness, and to avoid the trappings of the world and the apostate church system, Jezebel (Babylon the Great). Later in the Revelation, Jesus, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the Lamb that was slain but lives forevermore, is shown unsealing the book of prophetic revelation wherein is described the external forces that wage war against God's church. As the **Seven Seals** are removed by Jesus Christ, we also find **Seven Trumpets** and associated **Woes** that describe the judgments of God upon the apostate church system and the nations that support her.

With the increase of knowledge that has been given to the last day church, the 144,000, God has made known in more striking details the distinctions and parallels between the Internal and the External. We are to see that God's workings at times are simultaneously reflected in both the internal and external, or in some cases the effects of one are causal to the other. God is glorified in His seen and unseen orchestration of world events, as well as His workings to prepare a Church without spot or wrinkle for Christ's Second Coming.

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Rule of First Mention

When interpreting symbols, imagery and allusions in bible prophecy, the first instance or mention of the symbol, image is the most comprehensive and complete. All subsequent allusions to the prophetic symbol or image compliment the first mention and may add additional detail, but the first mention bears the greatest weight. Examples of this rule are as follows:

The Angry Wild Horse of Islam is first described through Ishmael (Genesis 16:12)

- “And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him”

The East Wind that brings the scourge of locusts, both of which portray Islam, is first described through the Plagues of Egypt (Exodus 10:5-15)

- Locusts shall cover the face of the earth
- “And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day”
- The land is darkened (falsehood is spread) by the Locusts
- Locusts fill the earth and are a scourge to those who lack the seal of God (Revelation 9)

Worshipping the Image to the Beast is first described with Israel setting up the golden calf in the wilderness (Exodus 32)

- The apostate people of God collectively call for an Image to the Beast
- Image to the beast was in celebration of a counterfeit feast unto the Lord
- Those who worshipped the image to the beast were naked (spiritually)
- God’s wrath was upon those who worshipped the image to the Beast
- The Sons of Levi remain faithful and are purified to be priests of God – the [7-Last] plagues are stayed in their midst (Numbers 25:7-13)

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Rome comes-up 8th

Once again, another definitive pattern can be seen when reading and understanding bible prophecy; the pattern of Rome, whether Pagan or Papal, arising 8th in a series or sequence of events is seen reflected in bible prophecy. The number eight has significance in its representation of a resurrection [Jesus was resurrected on the “8th day”; circumcision, a symbol of baptism that itself involves a resurrection, was performed on the 8th day of life for a male child, etc.] and is therefore indicative of the fact that Rome too is resurrected historically and in the last days:

Daniel 7:7, 8

- The beast with 10 horns arises
- Three horns are removed by the Little Horn leaving 7
- The Little Horn (Papal Rome) is the 8th to arise

Daniel 8:3-9

- Medo-Persia is represented as a Ram with 2 horns
- Greece under Alexander, is represented as a Goat with 1 horn
- The one horn is broken and 4 less prominent horns arise from the one
- The Little Horn (Papal Rome) is the 8th horn to arise

Revelation 13:1-3

- The beast with 7 heads receives a deadly wound to a head
- The head is resurrected, representing the 8th head

Revelation 17:11

- “The beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven” (Papal Rome) whose deadly wound is healed.

Kingdoms of Bible Prophecy

1. Assyria
2. Egypt
3. Israel
4. Babylon
5. Medo-Persia
6. Greece
7. Pagan Rome
8. Papal Rome