

William Miller's
Rules of Interpretation
(with full Bible Passages included)

From Memoirs of William Miller by Sylvester Bliss 1853, Pages 70-72
See also Review and Herald March 16, 1868

"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 – RH Sep 16 1851

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 connexion 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

Mat 5:18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

RULE II.

All scripture is necessary, and may be understood by a diligent application and study.

PROOF

2Ti 3:15-17 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. **16** All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: **17** That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

RULE III.

Nothing revealed in the scripture can or will be hid from those who ask in faith, not wavering.

PROOF

Deu 29:29 The secret *things belong* unto the LORD our God: but those *things which are* revealed *belong* unto us and to our children for ever, that *we* may do all the words of this law.

Mat 10:26-27 Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. **27** What I tell you in darkness, *that* speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, *that* preach ye upon the housetops.

1Co 2:10 But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

Phi 3:15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

Isa 14:11 Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, *and* the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee.

Mat 21:22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

Joh 14:13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Jam 1:5-6 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. **6** But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

1Jo 5:13-15 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. **14** And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: **15** And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

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

Isa 28:7-29 But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble *in* judgment. **8** For all tables are full of vomit *and* filthiness, *so that there is* no place *clean*. **9** Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? *them that are* weaned from the milk, *and* drawn from the breasts. **10** For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little: **11** For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. **12** To whom he said, This *is* the rest *wherewith* ye may cause the weary to rest; and this *is* the refreshing: yet they would not hear. **13** But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. **14** Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which *is* in Jerusalem. **15** Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: **16** Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner *stone*, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. **17** Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. **18** And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing

scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. 19 From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only *to* understand the report. 20 For the bed is shorter than that *a man* can stretch himself *on it*: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself *in it*. 21 For the LORD shall rise up as *in* mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as *in* the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act. 22 Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth. 23 Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech. 24 Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? 25 When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rie in their place? 26 For his God doth instruct him to discretion, *and* doth teach him. 27 For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. 28 Bread *corn* is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break *it with* the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it *with* his horsemen. 29 This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, *which* is wonderful in counsel, *and* excellent in working.

Isa 25:8 He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken *it*.

Pro 19:27 Cease, my son, to hear the instruction *that causeth* to err from the words of knowledge.

Luk 24:27,44-45 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself... 44 And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me. 45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

Rom 16:26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

Jam 5:19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

2Pe 1:19,20 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: 20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

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.

PROOFS

Psa 19:7-11 The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple. 8 The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired *are they* than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. 11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned: *and* in keeping of them *there is* great reward.

Psa 119:97-105 O how love I thy law! it *is* my meditation all the day. **98** Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they *are* ever with me. **99** I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies *are* my meditation. **100** I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. **101** I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word. **102** I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me. **103** How sweet are thy words unto my taste! *yea, sweeter* than honey to my mouth! **104** Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. **105** NUN. Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Mat 23:8-10 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren. **9** And call no *man* your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. **10** Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, *even* Christ.

1Co 2:12-16 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. **13** Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. **14** But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. **15** But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. **16** For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Eze 34:18-19 *Seemeth it* a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet? **19** And *as for* my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which ye have fouled with your feet.

Luk 11:52 Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.

Mal 2:7-8 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he *is* the messenger of the LORD of hosts. **8** But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

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.

PROOFS

Psa 89:19 Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon *one that is* mighty; I have exalted *one* chosen out of the people.

Hos 12:10 I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.

Hab 2:2 And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make *it* plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

Act 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

1Co 10:6 Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

Heb 9:9 Which *was* a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience;... **24** or Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

Psa 78:2 I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old:

Mat 13:13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand... **34** All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them:

Gen 41:1-32 And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river. **2** And, behold, there came up out of the river seven well favoured kine and fatfleshed; and they fed in a meadow. **3** And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favoured and leanfleshed; and stood by the *other* kine upon the brink of the river. **4** And the ill favoured and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven well favoured and fat kine. So Pharaoh awoke. **5** And he slept and dreamed the second time: and, behold, seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk, rank and good. **6** And, behold, seven thin ears and blasted with the east wind sprung up after them. **7** And the seven thin ears devoured the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, *it was* a dream. **8** And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but *there was* none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh. **9** Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day: **10** Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard's house, *both* me and the chief baker: **11** And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream. **12** And *there was* there with us a young man, an Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret. **13** And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged. **14** Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved *himself*, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh. **15** And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and *there is* none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, *that* thou canst understand a dream to interpret it. **16** And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, *It is* not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace. **17** And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, In my dream, behold, I stood upon the bank of the river: **18** And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fatfleshed and well favoured; and they fed in a meadow: **19** And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill favoured and leanfleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness: **20** And the lean and the ill favoured kine did eat up the first seven fat kine: **21** And when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them; but they *were* still ill favoured, as at the beginning. So I awoke. **22** And I saw in my dream, and, behold, seven ears came up in one stalk, full and good: **23** And, behold, seven ears, withered, thin, *and* blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them: **24** And the thin ears devoured the seven good ears: and I told *this* unto the magicians; but *there was* none that could declare *it* to me. **25** And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh *is* one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he *is* about to do. **26** The seven good kine *are* seven years; and the seven good ears *are* seven years: the dream *is* one. **27** And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them *are* seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine. **28** This *is* the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God *is* about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh. **29** Behold, there come seven years of great plenty

throughout all the land of Egypt: **30** And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; **31** And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it *shall be* very grievous. **32** And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; *it is* because the thing *is* established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

Daniel Chapter 2, 7 & 8 (Image, unclean beasts, clean beasts)

Act 10:9-16 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: **10** And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, **11** And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: **12** Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. **13** And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. **14** But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. **15** And the voice *spake* unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, *that* call not thou common. **16** This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

RULE VII.

Visions are always mentioned as such.

PROOFS

2Co 12:1 It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

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.

PROOFS

Dan 2:35 Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth...**44** And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

Dan 7:8 I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn *were* eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things...**17** These great beasts, which are four, *are* four kings, *which* shall arise out of the earth.

Psa 119:105 Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Eze 4:6 And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year.

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.

Mar 4:13 And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?

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.

PROOFS

1. Indefinite. Ecc 7:14
2. Definite, a day for a year. Ezek 4:6
3. Day for a thousand years. 2 Pet 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.

PROOFS

Rev 12:1-2 And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: **2** And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

Rev 17:3-7 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. **4** And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: **5** And upon her forehead *was* a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. **6** And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. **7** And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.

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 fulfilment 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 fulfilment, 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.

PROOFS

Psa 22:5 They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.

Isa 45:17-19 *But* Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end. **18** For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I *am* the LORD; and *there is* none else. **19** I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.

1Pe 2:6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

Rev 17:17 For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.

Act 3:18 But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

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 no 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!