

**Q2 - SSP - 2025 April, May, June**

**Allusions, Images, Symbols:  
How to Study Bible Prophecy  
Shawn Boonstra**

James Rafferty-Q2-L1-2025-Figurative or Literal -April 3

Johnny-let the Bible guide us into prophetic truth  
Jill-that prophecy leads us to find salvation in Jesus  
Daniel-that the Bible does seal up some prophecies until the  
right time.  
Shelley-  
James Rafferty-Q2-L1-2025-Figurative or Literal -April 3

**Thursday**      *April 3*

**Figurative or Literal?**

One of the key issues students of prophecy need to deal with is how to determine whether the language of the Bible is to be taken literally or figuratively. How does one determine if the author was using symbolic language, and how does one know what the symbol represented?

**WILLIAM MILLERS PRINCIPLES OF PROPHETIC  
INTERPRETATION:**

**William Millers rules of interpretation**

"1. Every word must have its proper bearing on the subject presented in the Bible. Proof, Matt. 5,18.

"2. All Scripture is necessary, and may be understood by a diligent application and study. Proof, 2 Tim. 3, 15-17.

"3. Nothing revealed in the Scriptures can or will be hid from those who ask in faith, not wavering. Proof, Deut. 29, 29; Matt. 10,26,27; 1 Cor. 2.10; Phil. 3,15; Isa. 45,11; Matt. 21,22; John 14,13,14; 15,7; James 1,5,6; 1 John 5,13 - 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 error. Proof, Isa. 28,7 - 29; 35,8; Prov. 29,27;

Luke 24,27,44,45; Rom. 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 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, and not the Bible. Proof, Ps. 19,7 - 11; 119,97 - 105; Matt. 23,8 - 10; 1Cor. 2,12 - 16; Eze.34,18,19; Luke 11,52; Matt. 2,7,8.

The crucial way to do that is to see how that figure, the symbol, has been used all through the Bible, as opposed to looking at how a symbol is used in contemporary times. For example, some see the bear symbol in Daniel 7 as pointing to Russia, because that image is often used today as a symbol of Russia. This is not a sound or safe way to interpret prophetic symbolism.

"6. 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, Ps. 89,19; Hos.12,10; Hab. 2,2; Acts 2,17; 1 Cor. 10,6; Heb. 9,9,24; Ps. 78,2; Matt. 13,13,34; Gen. 41,1 - 32; Dan. 2,7 and 8; Acts 10,9 - 16.

"7. Visions are always mentioned as such. 2Cor. 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, Dan. 2,35,44; beasts, meaning kingdoms, Dan. 7,8,17; waters, meaning people, Rev. 17,1,15; day meaning year, etc. Eze. 4,6.

"9. 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.

"10. Figures sometimes have two or more different significations, as day is used in a figurative sense to represent three different periods of time, namely: first, indefinite, Eccl. 7,14; and second, definite, a day for a year, Eze.4,6; and third, a day for a thousand years, 2Pet. 3,8.

"The right construction will harmonize with the Bible, and make good sense; other constructions will not.

"11. If a word makes good sense as it stands, and does no violence to the simple laws of nature, it is to be understood literally; if not, figuratively. Rev. 12,1,2; 17,3-7.

"12. To learn the meaning of a figure, trace the word through your Bible, and when you find it explained, substitute the explanation for the word used; and if it make good sense, you need not look further; if not, look again.

"13. To know whether we have the true historical event for the fulfillment of 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 shall agree, so that the true believing children of God may never be ashamed. Ps. 22,5; Isa. 45,17-19; 1Pet. 2,6; Rev. 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 wordly 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 who takes notice of the sparrow's fall, 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. (James White, Life Incidents, 1868, pp. 36-37).

**Look up the following texts, allowing the Bible to be its own expositor (to define its own terms). What is the prophetic**

**symbol common to the texts in each case, and what does the Bible say it represents?**

*Dan. 7:7, Dan. 8:3, Dan. 7:24*

*Rev. 1:16, Eph. 6:17, Heb. 4:12*

*Rev. 12:1; Rev. 21:2; Eph. 5:31, 32; Jer. 6:2*

By following the simple rule that the Bible must be allowed to define its own terms, most of the mystery behind prophetic symbolism simply disappears. For example, we see that a horn can symbolize a political power or a nation. A sword can symbolize the Word of God. And, yes, a woman can symbolize the church. Here we can clearly see the Bible explaining itself. What remains to be answered, however, is why God would speak in symbols instead of being forthright? Why, for example, would Peter cryptically refer to the city of Rome as Babylon, in 1 Peter 5:13?

There may be many reasons why God has chosen to communicate symbolically in prophecy. In the case of the New Testament church, for example, if the book of Revelation had plainly named Rome as the perpetrator of so much evil, the already bad persecution of the church might have been even worse. Whatever the reasons, we can trust that God wants us to understand what the symbols mean.

**Even if some symbols and prophecies remain mysteries, how can focusing on what we do understand strengthen our faith?**



**JOHN 14:29- 13:19 believe in Jesus**