

## The Great Controversy Series

### 27: William Miller, an American Reformer

William Miller was a farmer in the United States. He was not able to go to college but he was a man that loved to read and to reason. He had sound reasoning capacity and in his community his moral reputation was impeccable. He was known for being hardworking and benevolent. He gave good service both in civil and military offices. The Lord used him in a large capacity to announce Jesus' second coming.

While Miller was still a youth he was in the company of Deists. What do deists believe? Especially in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries it was an intellectual movement. Deists believe in a Creator but they believe that the Creator does not take an interest in the daily activities of people. He started the world like a wind-up toy and then forgot the world and left. In this belief system there is no place for the Bible. Because the Bible describes the Creator as one who loves people and is involved in their daily lives it is not accepted by deists. Miller and his friends criticized and rejected the Bible as God's word.

Miller held to these beliefs for about 12 years but he was uncomfortable inside. He had no assurance of a life beyond the grave. What was eternity? Why was there death? He could find no answer. To think about eternal death was a cold and uncomfortable activity. To think about accountability to the Creator was no better because he knew that he was not without sin.

He continued in this depressed state for some time. But one day a thought came into his mind. How wonderful it would be if there was someone who would save us from our sins by making atonement! But outside of the Bible he could find no information about such a savior or afterlife. Miller found in the Bible that he had criticized just the Savior that he wanted. But if the Bible was not inspired from God as he thought, how could it be that it was a source that would perfectly meet the needs of a fallen humanity. He confessed that the Bible must be a book revealed by God. In Jesus he found a sincere friend and the Bible as a light showing the way. He openly confessed belief in the Bible. His friends reminded him of the objections that he himself had put forward. Miller couldn't give an answer just then. Miller reasoned that if the Bible was a revelation from God that it must be consistent within itself. Since the Bible was given to direct people he thought it must be conformable to his understanding. Therefore he began to study the Bible for himself.

Starting with the first book of the Bible, Genesis, he began to read verse by verse. When he came across a verse that was hard to understand he compared it with other verses that were on the same topic. He did this using a concordance and marginal references. Thus he found solutions for difficult passages in other verses of the Bible. He would pray for understanding and he began to understand the Bible better. He said, "I was thus satisfied that the Bible is a system of revealed truths, so clearly and simply given that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein."

The Bible explains its own expressions. Let me give a few examples. These are not Miller's examples but ones that I gathered.

We will read two verses. Some people find these verses contradictory to each other.

1 Peter 2:17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Does the Creator really want us to fear Him? Doesn't the Bible tell us to love the Lord with all our heart? Then how shall we think concerning the Lord? Let the Bible explain its own terms.

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate.

When we compare Bible verses the true meaning comes out. When the Bible says, "Fear God" it means to hate evil.

Thus William Miller using the procedure of comparing a verse with other verses and because he prayed he found in the Bible a beautiful and consistent harmony.

Let me give another example.

Matthew 25:41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

Many people, after reading this verse, think that the Bible teaches that Satan and his angels together with the wicked will burn in a fire for eternity. Is God like that? Will the wicked suffer torture for eternity for one lifetime of sin? Where is justice? Will God who is love do such a thing? But if we compare these texts with other texts we will see that the Bible is not teaching that.

In this verse, the word "everlasting" is the Greek word 'aionion.' The word means everlasting or eternal. O.K., let's look at another verse.

Jude 1:7 as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

The word translated 'eternal' in this verse is the same word as we found in Matthew 25:41. The Bible says that Sodom and Gomorrah suffered the vengeance of eternal fire. But everyone knows that these cities are not burning today. How can we understand this? Easy. These are expressions and they explain one another. It is not the fire that lasts forever but the results of the fire. The cities will never be again.

Malachi 4:3 You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this," Says the LORD of hosts.

That is the wicked will not burn forever. They are destroyed in the fire and that result lasts forever. Let the Bible explain its own expressions.

While Miller was doing his Bible studies, he understood that a popular belief was actually unfounded. In Miller's time, many people believed that before the world would end Jesus Christ would reign over a spiritual kingdom in this world. According to this theory the whole world would become believers and for 1000 years there would be tranquility, peace and prosperity. Even today there are some who hold to this idea.

But Miller couldn't find evidence to sustain that idea in the Bible. He discovered just the opposite.

Matthew 13:30 'Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."

Jesus said that the tares which represent the wicked and the wheat which represents the righteous would grow together until the end of the world.

2 Timothy 3:13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

2 Timothy 3:1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:

2 Thessalonians 2:8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

That is, as Jesus coming approaches the world will not be better but it will be worse. The world in general will not accept Jesus and be believers. It is a nice dream but it is wrong.

Miller found that Jesus' second coming is not spiritual but physical and personal.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.<sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

This is not a spiritual coming. Jesus will come Himself and take us.

Matthew 24:30 "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

When Jesus comes will the people in general be believers? No. Just the opposite. They will mourn. Why? They do not want to see Jesus. They are living in sin and they don't want to meet the one who judges the world.

Matthew 24:27 "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Jesus coming will not be secret. Everyone will see it.

Matthew 25:31 " When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.

When Jesus comes He will not sit on a spiritual throne but a throne of glory.

Matthew 24:31 "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Matthew 25:31 " When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.<sup>32</sup> "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.<sup>33</sup> "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.<sup>34</sup> "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

When Jesus comes the wicked and the believers will be separated and the believers will receive their reward. We will be changed.

1 Corinthians 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed --<sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.<sup>53</sup> For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

These and other verses proved to Miller that the setting up of God's kingdom of glory and the occurrence of universal peace would happen after Jesus returns. The world's condition was not good. Miller understood that Jesus' coming was soon.

Other evidence pointed to this conclusion. There are time prophecies in the Bible. Predicted events happened in a set time frame. As examples we can provide the 120 years to the flood (Genesis 6:3), The seven days before the flood and the 40 days of rain (Genesis 7:4), Abraham's offspring sojourning 400 years (Genesis 15:13), the baker and the butler's 3 days (Genesis 40:12-20), pharaoh's dream of seven years (Genesis 41:28-54), the 40 years in the desert (Numbers 14:34), the three years of famine (1 Kings 17:1; Luke 4:25), 70 years of captivity (Jeremiah 25:11), Nebuchadnezzar's 7 times (Daniel 4:13-16), and the 70 weeks allotted to the Jews (Daniel 9:24-27). All of these were at one time a prediction and in the end they all happened in their time.

Miller could not ignore a time prophecy, which to his understanding extended to the time of the second advent. In the end there was a great spiritual revival. Next time we will look more closely at the prophecy that Miller discovered and the resulting revival.

Jesus is coming again! Get ready!