When we interpret the Bible, we must remember that a word may be used in different senses in different places.

2. A word cannot mean anything you wish

In Lewis Carroll’s stories about Alice’s adventures, Alice holds a strange conversation with Humpty Dumpty. He made a fine argument in favor of un-birthday presents versus birthday presents, and finished up by saying, “There’s glory for you!” Alice complained, “I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory’”. Humpty Dumpty said, “I meant 'there’s a nice knock-down argument for you'”. “But 'glory' doesn’t mean a 'nice knock down argument'” Alice objected.

"When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean..." was Humpty’s scornful response. Alice felt that you cannot make words mean so many different things.

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be the master, that’s all".

Whilst a word can mean many things, each of those things must be sensible with regard to that word. That’s why, for example, Peter used the word "defense" in 1Pe 3:15 and did not use the word "glory" in that place. The word "defense" can mean "a nice knock-down argument" but the word "glory" would not express that idea at all.

No, Humpty Dumpty, a word cannot mean anything you choose it to mean.

When we interpret the Bible, we must not attribute to a word any meaning of our own choosing.

3. A word can mean only one thing at a time

As an example, the word 'word' itself is used in the sentence, "For the kingdom of God does not consist in word, but in power" (1Co 4:20). Obviously 'word' here must refer to the prattling of men. It means this one thing here.

In another place we have, "those who gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41). Obviously here 'word' refers to the message of Christ which Peter had preached. It means this different thing here.

Only one of those meanings can exist in one place. For instance, Paul could not mean that the kingdom of God does not consist in the message of Christ but in power, for he claims that the message of Christ is the power (Rom 1:16).

When we interpret the Bible we must remember that a word can mean but one thing in one place and we cannot accommodate two conflicting meanings.

4. A word means what its user meant

Each time a word is used, its meaning is fixed in that instance, by the user. The hearer is not free to put his own meaning on it. Rather, he must gather what the user meant by it.

For example, when Jesus used the word 'temple' in one instance, people were wrong to put a meaning upon that word which Jesus had not intended. He meant the temple of his body, not the grand place of worship in Jerusalem (Jhn 2:19-22 Mtt 26:59-61 Mtt 27:39-40).

When we interpret the Bible we must strive to gather what the writers meant by what they said, and not make arbitrary interpretations.