

“Beelzebub”

In an effort to better understand the Bible, this article will examine the usage of the term “*Baalzebub*” in the Old Testament and the term “*Beelzebub*” in the New Testament.

Some scholars believe that “*Baalzebub*” originated with an intentional biblical corruption of the original name “*Baalzebul*,” meaning, “Baal the prince.” However, Thayer claims that many scholars have followed Jerome’s suggestion that “*Baalzebub*” means “lord of the fly” (p. 100). This was “*the god of Ekron*” (2 Kings 1:2-3, 6, 16) -- the name under which Baal was worshiped at the Philistine city of Ekron. “*Baalzebub*” was consulted by King Ahaziah of Israel regarding his recovery from an accident in which he “*fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber.*”

Some scholars regard “*Baalzebub*” as an oriental “Baal of flies” similar to the Greek god Zeus Apomyios or the Roman god Myagros. If this is correct, “*Baalzebub*” was worshiped as the producer of flies, and consequently as the god that was able to defend against this annoying pest. Barnes states that the word also signified the “god of filth” among the Jews, and was the most offensive of all the idol gods. A further suggestion that must be considered is that “*Baalzebub*” represented a god who gave oracles by the flight of a fly.

McIntosh, in the ISBE, offers another alternative. He states that it is more probable that “*zebub*,” which can mean “lord of the heavenly dwelling” in Ugaritic, was changed to “*Baalzebub*” to make the divine name a repulsive or disgraceful designation (Vol. 1, p. 381).

In the New Testament, “*Beelzebub*” is a heathen god considered the principle evil spirit by the Jews (Matthew 10:25; 12:27; Luke 11:18-19). The Pharisees called him the “*prince*” or “*chief*” of the demons (Matthew 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15), and Jesus identified him with Satan. It is thought that the Jews transferred the name in intertestamental times to Satan in contempt. When the Pharisees gave the name to Christ, they were heaping the greatest amount of contempt upon Him. However, if McIntosh is correct, the word “*Beelzebub*” in Matthew 10:25 would reflect the right form of the name, a wordplay on “*master of the house.*” The designation was still contemptuous, but in a different way.

Kyle Campbell