

“The Sons Of Belial”

“Belial” occurs 16 times in the Old Testament and only once in the New Testament. It is used as an epithet of scorn and disdain, meaning “worthlessness,” and it is often translated as “sons of Belial.” The terms “men,” “man,” “son,” “daughter” and “children” are all also used with Belial. The same Hebrew word is translated as “wicked” (Deuteronomy 15:9; Job 34:18; Psalm 101:3; Nahum 1:11, 15), “ungodly” (2 Samuel 22:5; Psalm 18:4; Proverbs 16:27; 19:28), “evil disease” (Psalm 41:8) and “naughty” (Proverbs 6:12).

In the period between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Jewish apocalyptic writings (Book of Jubilees, Ascension of Isaiah, Sibylline Oracles) and the Dead Sea Scrolls used “belial” as a proper name for Satan, the prince of lawlessness and darkness. Vine states, “The oldest form of the word is *Beliar*, possibly from a phrase signifying ‘Lord of the forest,’ or perhaps simply a corruption of the form *Belial*, due to harsh Syriac pronunciation” (p. 118).

Paul employs the term once in 2 Corinthians 6:15. In this passage, “Belial” (Greek, *beliar*) stands opposed to Christ. Its use occurs within five rhetorical questions, each of which presupposes a negative answer. They stress the incompatibility of the gospel and idolatry, the incongruity of intimate relationships or fellowship between believers and unbelievers. After two comparisons of abstract nouns (“righteousness” and “light” with “unrighteousness” and “darkness”), there follow two personal comparisons: “Christ” and “he that believeth” with “Belial” and the “infidel.” The final contrast between the “temple of God” and “idols” climaxes the series and prompts the Old Testament quotations (Exodus 29:45; Leviticus 26:12; Isaiah 52:11).

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