

Who was Beelzebub?

Beelzebub is the Greek form of the name Baal-zebub, a pagan Philistine god worshiped in the ancient Philistine city of Ekron during the Old Testament times. It is a term signifying “the lord of flies” (2 Kings 1:2). Archaeological excavations at ancient Philistine sites have uncovered golden images of flies. After the time of the Philistines, the Jews changed the name to “Beelzeboul,” as used in the Greek New Testament, meaning “lord of dung.” This name referenced the god of the fly that was worshiped to obtain deliverance from the injuries of that insect. Some biblical scholars believe Beelzebub was also known as the “god of filth,” which later became a name of bitter scorn in the mouth of the Pharisees. As a result, Beelzebub was a particularly contemptible deity, and his name was used by the Jews as an epithet for Satan.

The word has two parts: Baal, which was the name for the Canaanite fertility gods in the Old Testament; and Zebul, which means “exalted dwelling.” Putting the two parts together, they formed a name for Satan himself, the prince of demons. This term was first used by the Pharisees in describing Jesus in Matthew 10:24-25. Earlier, they had accused Jesus of casting “out the demons by the ruler of the demons” (Matthew 9:34), referencing Beelzebub (Mark 3:22; Matthew 12:24).

In Matthew 12:22 Jesus healed a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. As a result, “all the people were astonished and said, ‘Could this be the Son of David?’ But when the Pharisees heard this, they denied that this could be a work of God, but instead declared: ‘It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons’” (Matthew 12:23-24).

It is remarkable that the Pharisees reacted to this incredible miracle by Jesus in the

very opposite way of that of the multitude, who realized that Jesus was from God. In fact, it was an admission by the Pharisees that Jesus worked miracles or performed deeds beyond the reach of any unaided human power, but they attributed this power to Beelzebub instead of God. Actually, they should have known better: the devil cannot do works of pure goodness. However, in their self-absorbed pride, these Pharisees knew that, if the teachings of Jesus should prevail among the people, their influence over them was at an end. So, the miracle they did not deny, but instead attributed it to an infernal power, “Beelzebub the prince of the demons.”

The greater question is this: what relevance does this have to us as Christians today? In Matthew 10, Jesus provides us with the very essence of what it means to be His disciple. Here we learn that He is about to send out His apostles into the world to preach the gospel (Matthew 10:7). He gives them specific instructions on what to do and what not to do. He warns them, “Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. . . . All men will hate you because of me” (Matthew 10:17, 22). Then He adds, “A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!” (Matthew 10:24-25).

The point Jesus is making to us today is that, if people are calling Him Satan, as did the Pharisees of His time, they would surely call His disciples the same. In John chapter 15 Jesus declares, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they

persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me” (John 15:18-21).