Preface: Throughout Scripture, we have references to sons of Belial and even a daughter of Belial; therefore, it might be a good idea to have some idea as to what we are speaking of.

Topics: Hebrew
Greek
Latin
Belial as Found in Scripture
Paul’s Use of the Term Belial
Conclusion

Charts: Examples of Various Translations of בִּלְיָהָל

1. First, we need some vocabulary: בִּלְיָהָל (בִּלְיָהָל) [pronounced b*leey-YAH-gahl], is transliterated Belial, and it gives the sense of being a proper noun, partly because of the fact that it was originally transliterated in the KJV and partly because sons of Belial simply makes it sound like a proper noun. However, it is a compound word, being made up of two words: (1) בִּי (b) [pronounced b*LEE], which means not, without. Strong's #1097 BDB #115. And (2) יָל (yâ) [pronounced yaw-GAHL], which means to profit, to avail, to benefit. Strong's #3276 BDB #418. Together, the word mean without value, worthless, ruin, good-for-nothing, ungodly, wicked. In modern English, rather than render a phrase as sons of Belial, we might give it the more updated rendering of sons of bitches. More about this word in point #2.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Deut. 15:9</th>
<th>I Sam. 1:16</th>
<th>I Sam. 2:12</th>
<th>Job 34:18</th>
<th>Psalm 41:8(9)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>your ___ heart</td>
<td>daughter of ___</td>
<td>sons of ___</td>
<td>“[You are] ___”</td>
<td>a ___ disease</td>
<td>a ___ man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEV</td>
<td>guilty</td>
<td>no good</td>
<td>dishonest</td>
<td>unfair</td>
<td>fatal</td>
<td>Worthless</td>
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<tr>
<td>God's Word™</td>
<td>worthless</td>
<td>good-for-nothing</td>
<td>good-for-nothing</td>
<td>good-for-nothing</td>
<td>scoundrel</td>
<td>devilish</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAB</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>a ne'er-do-well</td>
<td>wicked</td>
<td>wicked</td>
<td>deadly</td>
<td>scoundrel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASB*</td>
<td>base</td>
<td>a worthless woman</td>
<td>worthless men</td>
<td>‘Worthless one’</td>
<td>wicked</td>
<td>worthless</td>
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<td>NIV</td>
<td>wicked</td>
<td>a wicked woman</td>
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<td>worthless</td>
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<tr>
<td>NJB</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>a worthless woman</td>
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<td>scoundrel</td>
<td>fatal</td>
<td>worthless</td>
</tr>
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<td>NKJV*</td>
<td>wicked</td>
<td>a wicked woman</td>
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<td>NRSV</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>a worthless woman</td>
<td>scoundrels</td>
<td>scoundrel</td>
<td>deadly</td>
<td>scoundrels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REB</td>
<td>villainous</td>
<td>so devoid of shame</td>
<td>scoundrels</td>
<td>‘You scoundrel.’</td>
<td>evil</td>
<td>scoundrel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is not a comprehensive listing of the passages in which bîliyyaʿal is found, but a representative grouping of them. As you can obviously see, except for Young, each translation gives the word a slightly different spin, depending upon its context.

*Transliteration sons of Belial, when appropriate, footnoted.

2. This is translated by the KJV as Belial, naughty, ungodly, wicked; BDB gives its meanings as worthless, ruin, destruction, good-for-nothing. I prefer without any value. as it has a more degrading connotation, even though it means the same as worthless and good-for-nothing. The NIV renders this word with wicked, troublemaker(s), scoundrel(s). Rotherham renders this the Abandoned One. The key is that this noun is transliterated into the Greek and used as a name for Satan (II Cor. 6:15), who is the embodiment of lawlessness and evil. The original rendering is actually good, as it identifies the parent of the person found here—Satan is the father of those who lead others away from God. Now the sons of Eli were men of Belial; they did not know Yhôwh (I Sam. 2:12). These men are more than lost—they are leading others astray as well. In the majority, this word is found in conjunction with sons, man (men) as in sons of Belial. (Judges 19:221 20:13 I Sam. 1:16 2:12 10:27 II Sam. 16:7 20:1 Psalm 18:4 Prov. 16:27) and it is occasionally found apart from this phrase (Deut. 15:9 Job 34:18 Psalm 41:8 Prov. 16:27 19:28 Nahum 1:15*). C.L. Burney suggests that we dismiss the Massoretic vowels and interpret this as coming from the root word bâla, which means to swallow, and therefore understand bîliyyaʿal to mean engulfing ruin.2 Strong's #1100  BDB #116.

3. Greek translations of belial:
   b. Loimos (λοίμος) [pronounced loy-MOSS], which means pestilence, disease. As an additional note, Brenton became rather free in his translation of this word the further along that he got in Samuel. In II Sam. 20:1, you cannot even find sons of pestilence or anything approximating that in his rendering of ἱός παράνομος. Strong's #3061. I Sam. 1:16 2:13 10:27 II Sam. 16:7 20:1.
   c. Paranomos (παρανόμος) [pronounced pa-RAH-noh-moss], which means contrary to the law, lawless; in the plural, it could be rendered transgressors, evil doers. This is the word found most often as the Greek equivalent of bîliyyaʿal. Strong's #none. Deut. 13:13 Judges 19:22 20:13 Psalm 41:8 (40:8 in Septuagint) 101:3 (100:3) Prov. 6:12.
   d. One conclusion that we can draw is that those who translated the Septuagint either did not really grasp the meaning of the word. Furthermore, it is a testimony in itself as to the unevenness of the translation of the Septuagint itself (although, do not be too haughty about English translations, as none of them were as consistent as the Septuagint in this regard).


5. The Talmud believes bîliyyaʿal to mean without a yoke, but there is no reasonable support for this understanding.

6. Various uses of bîliyyaʿal in scripture:

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1 You just about cannot find men of less value than what is found in this passage.


c. *A daughter of Belial*: I Sam. 1:16

d. *A torrent of Belial*: (II Sam. 22:5 Psalm 18:5).

e. *A heart of Belial*: Deut. 15:9

f. *A word of Belial*: Psalm 41:10 (this refers, apparently, to a disease) 101:3.

g. Also, *Adam of Belial* (Prov. 6:12), *a witness of Belial* (Prov. 19:28), *a counselor of Belial* (Nahum 1:11), and “Who says to a king, ‘B'lıyya`al?’” (Job 34:18)

h. *B'lıyya`al* is only found by itself in Nahum 1:15.

i. Nowhere in the Old Testament is this used as a proper name, or could it be construed as reasonably needing to be a proper name.

j. The Greek Septuagint does not transliterate *b'lıyya`al*, which is what would have been done with a proper noun. However, in the literature of Paul’s time (and earlier), *Belial* (or, actually *Beliar*) was used as a proper noun.

7. ZPEB: *Sinners of the worst type are in view in [use of] the term.*

8. ZPEB also points out that in four of the instances named above in point 6, four appear to be associated with destruction (Psalm 18:4 41:8 Nahum 1:11 1:15).

9. Paul uses the Greek transliteration of this word, no doubt influenced by writings of his day (he was obviously very well-read). In II Cor. 6:15, he writes: *What harmony has Christ with Belial,*\(^5\) or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? The term *Belial* had taken upon itself the idea of a Satanic figure (if not Satan himself) in Paul’s day. Paul’s use of that term does not mean we should adjust the meaning of *b'lıyya`al* in the Old Testament; his writing to the Corinthians was using a commonly understood name for Satan in order to make a point.

10. **Conclusion**: I think that we could reasonably conclude that this *b'lıyya`al* is not a proper noun in the original Hebrew but simply a compound word which means *without value, without worth, worthless*. You may wonder, why all the mystique? *Why wasn't it simply properly translated all along?* There appear to be three reasons:

a. The translators of the Septuagint realized that there was a negative connotation to this word, but were not exactly certain as to its meaning (or, at least, did not appear to be).

b. The Talmud was confused about its meaning as well, thinking it to mean *without a yoke*.

c. Finally, in later Jewish writings, *Belial* was used as a proper noun, referring either to *Satan* or to the *Pseudo-Messiah*. We find this in the apocalyptic books of Jubilees, the Ascension of Isaiah, and the Sibylline Oracles.\(^6\) When Paul uses their term in a similar fashion, this appears to give credence to the idea that *b'lıyya`al* should stand for a proper name, but it is his concession to the use of that word during his time, and not its use a millennium earlier.

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\(^5\) Actually, in the Greek, it is *Beliar*; it is not unusual to substitute one liquid letter for another in transliteration, according to *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible,* Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 513. Thayer attributes it to the harsh Syriac pronunciation of *Belial* (*Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, American Book Company, ©1889, p. 100). In our modern world, some Orientals with a strong accent occasionally replace an *l* with an *r* when they speak. I recall one of the key phrases of the movie *Chinatown* was “*Bad for grass,*” which Jack Nicholson originally shrugged off as Oriental babbling, was actually “*Bad for grass.*”