

THE EVIL EYE IN CULTURAL AND CHURCH HISTORY
CONTENTS

Ps 33:18-20: Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waits for the LORD: he is our help and our shield. (KJV)

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the middle of “The Americana”, Glendale’s luxurious mall, a sidewalk vendor openly sells what she calls “lucky charms”. These trinkets are marketed as bracelets, brooches, car accessories, wall hangings and Christmas ornaments. Though generally known as evil eye charms, these items have morphed into fashion accessories. The saleslady sold a wide cultural variety: the elephant charm of the Hindus, the dolphin charm of the Romans, the horseshoe charm of the Bedouins and Celts, the hand charm of the Middle East, the crucifix of the Roman Catholic Church and the wall hanging of saints of the Armenian Orthodox church.



Belief in the evil eye was so common that many cultures had a term for it in their vocabulary. Many cultures recognized the problem of the “evil eye”, and developed ways to cope. Each culture developed its own theory as to the causes, the common symptoms, the possible prevention and cure for the evil eye. However, there are discernible patterns. The word is different but the concept is the same. For example, the evil eye charm shaped like a hand with an eye in the center of the palm is called, “The Hand of Miriam” by the Jews, “The Hand of Fatima” by Muslims, and “The Hand of Christ” by early Greek Orthodox Christians.

Two primary sources that are consistently cited in bibliography on the evil eye are: the 1895 *Evil Eye: An Account of this Ancient and Widespread Superstition*, edited by Frederick Elworthy (Elworthy); and the 1981 *The Evil Eye: A Casebook*, edited by Alan Dundes (Dundes). These books confirm the wide-ranging cultural data.

Our assignment was to research the evil eye in the history of different cultures and also in bible history. We investigated bible translations, bible commentaries, books and magazine articles in the library and on the internet, and videos on YouTube.

A. Scope of Study

While reading about cultural beliefs on the evil eye, it is easy to get lost in the cultural anecdotes and details, and fall into the occult. Instead of relying on folklore definition, we began to understand the evil eye after we examined its definition in the bible.

We followed a chronological approach to the history of the evil eye. Hence, we start with the Ugarit whose civilization existed 8000 B.C. before going to church history as reflected in the writings of the early Church Fathers around 200-300 A.D.

In the Preface to his 1881 fiction, *The Evil Eye or the Black Spectre*, William Carleton predicted "...[the Evil Eye] like other superstitions, it is fast fading out of the public mind. Education and knowledge will soon banish those idle and senseless superstitions: indeed it is a very difficult thing to account for their existence at all..." (Carleton)

Carleton's prediction proved false. In 1970, Blum declared that "present evil eye beliefs have survived without important changes over several thousands of years." (Blum) In 2010, the evil eye not only survives, but also thrives in today's multi-media culture. The modern view is outside the scope of our assigned task to research on the evil eye in history of different cultures and in bible history. However, here are a few modern references:

- In the internet, there are how-to videos on YouTube that demonstrate how to cure the evil eye by using the Italian method or the Greek method. There are websites that sell evil eye charms and amulets.
- NASA has a webpage called "Evil Eye Galaxy", referring to Messier 64 (M64) which has a bright nucleus surrounded by a dark dust band. (Evil Eye Galaxy)
- In *Ophthalmology Times*, two ophthalmologists discuss how to prevent the evil eye. (Medow and Bohigian)
- A psychiatrist tried to prove the "objective reality" of the evil eye by measuring the "human ocular extramission" or energy emanating from the eye. (Ross)
- In literature, the narrator in Edgar Allen Poe's short story *The Tell-Tale Heart* tells the police that he killed the old man who had an evil eye.
- The *Li'l Abner* cartoon has a character named Evil-Eye Fleegle who puts a "whammy" or "double whammy" on others. (Can the expression 'double whammy' be used with good things?)

B. Personal Bias

In the evil eye literature, there is a clash of viewpoints between those who consider the evil eye superstitious folklore and those who ascribe to the supernatural element in the evil eye. Our own experiences lead us to assume that there is a supernatural element to the "evil eye".

While we affirm the supernatural existence of the evil eye, we believe that the rituals and amulets are superstitious and occultic in nature and so prefer not to dwell on them. We decided to neither go into detail about amulet designs nor describe the evil eye rituals. However for the reader's information, Elworthy provided detailed analysis of the various charms and amulets designed to protect against the evil eye. Dundes' provided a collection of essays that describe the rituals of various cultures. (Adalsteinsson)

C. Research Limitations

In the section on Cultural History, we explain ancient Western civilization in depth, but provide only a brief description of other civilizations. Most of the literature on the evil eye covers the Middle East and the Mediterranean. It took us six months to collect that data. We suppose that it would take us more than six months to collect more substantial data for the ancient civilizations of Asia, Africa, Australia and the Americas.

II. DEFINITION OF EVIL EYE

The Oxford English dictionary defines “the evil eye” as “a gaze or stare superstitiously believed to cause material harm.” (Oxford Dictionaries Online)

There are two aspects to the Evil Eye: the perpetrator (the person with the “evil eye” who is sometimes personified as the Evil Eye or as the Italians call him or her, *jettatore*) and the victim (persons, objects or places which suffer the ill effects from the gaze). Budge observed that “Evil spirits and the Evil Eye have from time immemorial been regarded as one and the same. So that in the East and West, the Evil Eye has been regarded as a being with a form and personality.” (Budge)

For the victim, fear of the evil eye caused him to fear having wealth, beauty or any kind of perceived advantage over others that would provoke a perpetrator to envy him. For the perpetrator, gazing at the victim or giving a compliment, intentionally or unintentionally, released the destructive power of the evil eye on the victim.

Cultural literature on the evil eye revealed a variety of causes, preventions, symptoms and cures for the evil eye based on anecdotal experiences. It is easy to get lost in the anecdotal details. To get a baseline definition, we looked for the biblical definition of the evil eye.

Dickie noted that Byzantine Christians believed “envy lends a malign power to men’s eyes...the eyes of envious men are able, unaided, to inflict injury at a distance.” (Dickie) Many modern translations like the NIV use words such as “ill will” or “envy” in place of the literal text, “evil eye”. However, Ben Yehuda, the Father of Modern Hebrew, treated the “evil eye” concept as a single word. (Yehuda) In the following sections, we use the King James Bible (KJV), factoring out the “thee and thy”, the Literal Translation (LITV) and the Strong’s Concordance (Strong).

A. Old Testament Verses

In the Old Testament verses which contain “evil eye”, Deuteronomy uses the Hebrew word *ra’ a’* for “evil” (H7489)ⁱ referring to committing evil by spoiling, literally “by breaking to pieces”; figuratively “to make good for nothing”. However, Proverbs uses the word *ra’ ah* for “evil” (H7451)ⁱⁱ referring to a calamity or trouble that befalls a person. In other words, Deuteronomy focuses on the perpetrator while Proverbs focuses on the victim.

Deu 15:9 Beware that there is no evil thought in your heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release draws near; and **your eye be evil (H7489)** against your needy brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to Jehovah against you and it be sin to you. (LITV)

In the foregoing verse, this is a warning to the perpetrator. The following verses describe the perils for the perpetrator in not heeding God’s voice. During a siege, parents develop the evil eye which causes them to eat their offspring and not share it. The ultimate consequence of the evil eye seems to be selfish destruction of life, even those of closest kin.

Deu 28:15 And it shall be, if you will not heed the voice of your God, to take heed to do all His commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today, even all these curses shall come on you and overtake you:... (LITV)

Deu 28:53-55 And you shall eat the fruit of your body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom Jehovah your God has given to you, in the siege, and in the anguish with which your enemies shall distress you. The man *who is* tender and very delicate among you, **his eye shall be evil (H7489)** against his brother, and against the wife of his bosom, and against the remnant of his sons which he leaves, so that he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his sons that he shall eat, because he has nothing left to him in the siege, and in the anguish with which your enemies shall distress you in all your gates. (LITV)

Deu 28:56-57 The soft and delicate woman among you, who would not have ventured to set the sole of her foot on the ground for delicateness and tenderness, **her eye shall be evil (H7489)** against the husband of her bosom, and against her son, and against her daughter; and against her fetus which comes out from between her feet, even against her sons whom she shall bear. For she shall eat them in secret, for the lack of everything in the siege and in the anguish with which the enemy shall distress you within your gates. (LITV)

In the following verses, the King James version states, “Eat not the bread of **an evil eye...**”. In this case, the person is called an Evil Eye. Verses 7-8 illustrate that the evil-eyed person is double-minded, not saying what he is thinking. The result of this double-mindedness seems to be the inability of the victim to receive anything good from the perpetrator.

Pro 23:6-8 Do not eat the bread of one having **an evil eye (H7451)**, and do not desire his delicacies, for as he reasons in his heart, so is he! He says to you, Eat and drink, but his heart is not with you. You shall vomit the bit you have eaten and spoil your pleasant words. (LITV)

The evil eye is the opposite of a bountiful eye. Gill noted this contrast between Proverbs 23:6 and Proverbs 22:9 which states: “He that has a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he gives of his bread to the poor.” (Gill) Moreover, the *al tikri midrashim* (a Jewish bible study) postulates that instead of “shall be blessed”, the verb is active as in “will bless”. As the evil eye has the power to inflict injury, the bountiful eye has the power to bless or cause good to others. (Kern-Ulmer)

The following verse shows that the evil-eyed man is so mono-focused on getting rich that ironically, he is unaware that the opposite will happen. Wesley’s commentary on this verse provides a good definition of the evil eye as “uncharitable to persons in want, and envious to those who get anything besides him.” (Wesley)

Pro 28:22 A man with an **evil (H7451) eye**, hastens after wealth, but he does not know that poverty will come on him. (LITV)

In light of the evil eye and bountiful eye, consider Deut. 15:14 and Deut 15:18, which is a follow-up to Deut. 15:9 concerning the release of a Jewish servant by a wealthy Jewish master.

Deut 15:14 You shall richly adorn him from your flock, and from your threshing floor, and from your winepress, with that which Jehovah your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. (LITV)

Deut 15:18 It shall not seem hard in your eyes when you send him away free from you. For to the double of the hire of a hireling he has served you six years. And Jehovah your God will bless you in all that you do. (LITV)

Verse 14 points out that the bountiful-eyed person sees the blessing of God in his life, and then in turn blesses his servant. Verse 18 shows that the bountiful-eyed person won't be hard or resentful about releasing his servants with goods because he sees both God's blessing and the worth of the servant.

B. New Testament Verses

In the New Testament, the “evil” (πονηρός, ponēros, G4190)ⁱⁱⁱ eye comes from within a person and defiles his whole body. Jesus explains in parallel passages, Matthew 15:17-20 and Mark 7:18-23, that a man isn't defiled by what he eats but from what comes out of his heart. Both passages list the types of defilement that come out, but Mark 7:22 specifically notes the “evil eye” as coming out of the heart.

Mar 7:21-23 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, **an evil (G4190) eye**, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

In the following parallel passages, Jesus explains the difference between a bountiful eye and an evil eye. In Luke 11:34, Henry points out that the Greek root word for “single”, ἀπλοῦς or *haplous* (G573), in “when your eye is single”, means bountiful. (Henry) This idea is connected to Rom 12:8 on the redemptive gift of “Giving” and giving bountifully; and it is the same idea in 2 Corinthians and James; all three verses use the same word ἀπλότης or *haplotēs* (G572). Myers points out that the idiomatic expression for “eye is single” is the same Hebrew word for “bountiful eye” used in Prov 22:9. (Myers)

Mat 6:23 But if your **eye is evil (G4190)**, all your body is dark. If, then, the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! (LITV)

Luk 11:34 The light of the body is the eye: therefore **when your eye is single (G573)**, your whole body also is full of light; but when your **eye is evil (G4190)**, your body also is full of darkness.

Rom 12:8 Or he that exhorts, on exhortation: he that gives, let him do it with **simplicity (G572)**; he that rules, with diligence; he that shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

2Co 8:2 How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their **liberality (G572)**.

2Co 9:11 Being enriched in everything to all **bountifulness (G572)**, which causes through us thanksgiving to God.

2Co 9:13 While by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your **liberal (G572)** distribution unto them, and unto all men;

Jas 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men **liberally (G574)**, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him.

In Matthew 20:15, Jesus talks about the bountiful-eyed (or “good”) landowner who gives each worker the same pay and the evil-eyed workers who complain about his generosity. This passage points out another characteristic of an evil-eyed person. (Elliott) The evil-eyed person “is displeased at the good of others, and desires their hurt.” (Henry) A Kabbalah rabbi said that it was more than envy, and that the evil-eyed person, being intrinsically unhappy, resents the happiness of others. (Jacobson)

Mat 20:15 Or is it not lawful for me to do what I desire with my things? Or is your **eye evil (G4190)**, because I am good? (LITV)

A symptom of suffering from the evil eye is that one is charmed or bewitched. Eastman translates Galatians 3:1 as: “Who has cast **the evil eye** on you?” (Eastman). Other scholars agree with her view that “bewitched” refers to the “evil eye”. (Robertson) (Nanos)

Gal 3:1 O foolish Galatians, who **bewitched (G940)^v** you not to obey the truth, to whom before **your eyes** Jesus Christ was written before among you crucified? (LITV)

We agree with this interpretation, because the Greek word for bewitched in the Strong’s is *baskaina*, which is the basis for the Modern Greek word for evil eye, *vaskania*. The Strong’s definition, “to fascinate” lines up with the current word in modern Italy for evil eye, “*fascinato*”. (Yamauchi) Further, the Apostle Paul seemed to make a play on words, as he wonders how the Galatians could be affected by the “evil eye” after seeing with their “own eyes” Jesus Christ portrayed as crucified.

C. Things to Consider

2Ch 16:9 For the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro in all the earth in order to be strong for those with their heart perfect toward Him.... (LITV)

Consider that the Living God is ultimately the “Good Eye” and that the Living Creatures around the throne are covered with eyes.^v We postulate that the evil eye is a perversion of God’s Good Eye. We know that God’s protection and provision are upon us precisely because His eye is on us. We want God’s eyes upon us. But the belief in the evil eye provokes people to be fascinated with the fear of evil and the power of evil.

Joan Erickson postulated that the “guilty eye” has its origin in the Garden of Eden.

Gen 3:4-7 And the serpent said unto the woman: 'Ye shall not surely die; for God does know that in the day ye eat thereof, then **your eyes** shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.' And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the **eyes**, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. And the **eyes of them both were opened...** (Jewish Publication Society Bible)

Erickson wrote: “It would seem, the price of wisdom, of the knowledge of good and evil, is the loss of the innocent eye. Looking is no longer enough in itself. Looking becomes a means to an end, a tool—we lose paradise and are left with a deep and abiding nostalgia.” (Erickson)

If the origin of the evil eye is in the Garden of Eden, then it is connected to a Satanic lie about God's bountiful character and the lustful eyes of Adam and Eve. This may explain the global, ancient and pervasive impact of the first sin.

In summary, the bountiful-eyed man sees the blessings of God in his life because he knows that God's eyes are upon him; so he steps out in faith and receives more. But the evil-eyed man is blind to God's blessings on his life, is preoccupied on getting what he perceives as his lack, and becomes resentful of others' blessings. (Hamm) Hence, we postulate that the cure for the perpetrator is recognizing God's blessing, stepping out in faith and being thankful. And the cure for the victim is recognizing God's protection, as illustrated below:

Ps 33:18-20 Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waits for the LORD: he is our help and our shield.

III. CULTURAL HISTORY

Archeologists and anthropologists confirmed the belief in the evil eye through the discovery of ancient texts and artifacts. “Every language both ancient and modern contains a word or expression which is the equivalent of Evil Eye”. (Budge) The translations for the evil eye are listed in the Appendix. Though not every nation is listed, every continent is represented.

Why and when did people start to believe in the evil eye? In 1895, Elworthy declared the “origin of the belief is lost in the obscurity of prehistoric ages.” (Elworthy) To this day, no one has found any ancient text on the origins. The belief in the evil eye simply appears in the earliest recorded history and thereafter. The quotations and excerpts in the following sections are not meant to be exhaustive, but serve to illustrate the existence of the belief in the evil eye in each ancient civilization.

A. Mesopotamia

A series of archeological excavations from 1929 to the present gradually uncovered the prehistoric Ugarit. Their civilization goes back to at least 8000 B.C. (Pardee) A clay tablet, KTU 1.96^{vi}, dating to around 1400 BC written in Ugaritic script describes a spell to cure the evil eye. (Rainey) (Ford) It begins with the following verses:

The Eye goes, yea it runs;
It has seen its brother, that he is good.
Its brother, that he is lovely;
It has begun to devour his flesh without a knife.
To drink his blood without a cup;... (Calaway)^{vii}

The preceding quotation describes the murderous and cannibalistic nature of the evil eye which is similar to the description in Deuteronomy. Notice that the evil eye is simply called, ‘The Eye’.

The Sumerian word *IG-HUL* is translated as “eye evil.” A Sumerian text dated 3000 BC states: “The roving **Evil Eye** has looked on the neighborhood and vanished far away, has looked on the chamber of the land and has vanished far away, it has looked on the wanderer and like wood cut off for poles it has bent his neck.” (R. Thompson) (Phillips)

Other evidences in Mesopotamian history are:

- Thompson found seven references to the evil eye in Mesopotamian texts dated 2000 BC. (M. L. Thompson)
- An amulet from Arslan Tash, Syria has an inscription with an Aramaic script written in the Phoenician language of the early 700 B.C. (Caquot) T.H. Gaster translated it as: “Flee thou caster of the **evil eye**!...” (Garter) (Yamauchi)

B. Egypt

The Egyptians had the vocabulary for the evil eye, *iri-t-ban-t*, and for its bewitching effects, *sihu*. The hieroglyphics for *iri-t-ban-t* pictures an eye and knife. (Gonzalez-Wippler) Yet Budge observed that the evil eye is hardly mentioned in ancient Egyptian literature. (Budge)

However, a clear record of the evil eye is inscribed on the walls of the Temple of Horus in Edfu.^{viii} The text indicates that books of spells were recited in the temple to destroy the evil eye. (Budge) The “eye of Horus” or *Udjat*, which literally means “the sound or restored one”, was used to protect against the evil eye. The “eye of Horus” was crafted into amulets and pendants and painted on urns, ships and chariots. (Bohigian and Medow) (Hieroglyphs and Egyptian Art)

Egyptian mythology evolved so that the “eye of Horus” also became known as the “eye of Re (or Ra)”, the sun-god. (Watson) (Dunn) The British Museum stores thousands of amulets of the “eye of Re”. (Budge) Therefore, Egyptian artifacts clearly establish their belief in the evil eye. Additionally, the Pitts River Museum in Oxford displays fossil sharks’ teeth. These were used since the ancient Egyptian times to protect against poisoning and the evil eye. (Phillips)



Eye of Horus

C. Hebrew

Belief in the evil eye was part of the daily life as reflected in ancient rabbinic Judaism literature. (Kern-Ulmer)

The following passage from the Talmud contains a dialogue between rabbis about avoiding evil. (Fiensy) Written around 200 BC, the text comes from the Mischnah Pirkei Avot or “Ethics of the Fathers”. Avot 2.14, that is Chapter 2, verse 14 contains this:

He said to them: Go and see which is the evil way which a man should avoid.

- Rabbi Eliezer said, **an evil eye**.
- Rabbi Joshua said, an evil companion.
- Rabbi Yosi said, an evil neighbor.
- Rabbi Shimon said, he that borrows and does not repay. He that borrows from a man is as one that borrows from God, for it is written (Psalm 37:21) "The wicked borrow, and do not pay back, but the righteous are generous and keep giving."
- Rabbi Elazar said, an evil heart.

He said to them: I prefer the words of Elazar ben Arach to your words, for in his words yours are included.

Avot 5.22 has this:

Whosoever possesses these three qualities belongs to the disciples of Abraham our father: a generous eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul. But he who possesses the three opposite qualities--**an evil eye**, a proud spirit, and a haughty soul--is of the disciples of Balaam the wicked. (Sharei Shechem Torah Resources)

The Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 7b, affirms that rabbis have the power of the evil eye: “Wherever the Sages cast their eyes in disapproval, death or poverty resulted.” (Kern-Ulmer)

Aside from the Talmud, there are many rabbinical sayings about the evil eye, such as Rabbi Arika who stated that “99 of 100 people died because of the **evil eye!**” (Yamauchi)

Some Jewish scholars believe that one group of people are immune from the evil eye: Joseph’s descendants. They believed that an evil eye amulet with the text from Gen. 49:22 was a “play on words”.

Gen. 49:22 Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a **well** (H5869)

The Hebrew word for “well” is יַעַן or ayin in Strong’s. Since ayin literally means “eye”, “the verse is intended to say that Joseph was victorious over the Evil Eye and that every descendant shall be also”. (Bischoff)

Berakhot 20a^{ix} states that Joseph’s descendants are immune to the evil eye. Yet even Joseph’s descendants are instructed to follow this ritual when entering a city, as Berakhot 55b states: stick the right thumb in the left hand, and left thumb in his right, and say: "I, N. N., son of N. N., am of the seed of Joseph, whom the **evil eye** may not touch". (Kohler)

Written between 500 – 100 BC, the apocryphal book, *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, contains a description of a perpetrator who was cured by God. (Malina) Each son of Jacob purportedly offered their last Testament upon their death. Fragments of this book were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. (Benner) “*The Testament of Simeon Concerning Envy*” reveals the struggles of a perpetrator:

...at that time I was jealous of Joseph because our father loved him; and I set my mind against him to destroy him, because the prince of deceit sent forth the spirit of jealousy and blinded my mind, that I regarded him not as a brother, and spared not Jacob my father. But his God and the God of his fathers sent forth His angel, and delivered him out of my hands.

... God restrained me, and withheld from me all working of my hands, for my right hand was half withered for seven days. And I knew, my children, that because of Joseph this happened to me, and I repented and wept; and I besought the Lord that He would restore my hand unto me, and that I might be kept from all pollution and envy, and from all folly. For I knew that I had devised an evil deed before the Lord and Jacob my father, on account of Joseph my brother, in that I envied him.

... For envy rules over the whole mind of a man, and suffers him neither to eat, nor to drink, nor to do any good thing: it ever suggests to him to destroy him that he envies; and he that is envied ever flourishes, but he that envies fades away. Two years of days I afflicted my soul with fasting in the fear of the Lord, and I learnt that deliverance from envy comes by the fear of God. If a man flees to the Lord, the evil spirit runs away from him, and his mind becomes easy. And henceforward he sympathizes with him whom he envied, and condemns not those who love him, and so ceases from his envy.

... Now Joseph was a good man, and had the Spirit of God within him: compassionate and pitiful, he bore not malice against me; nay, he loved me even as the rest of his brothers.... All his days he reproached us not concerning this thing, but loved us as his own soul, and beyond his own sons; and he glorified us, and gave riches, and cattle, and fruits freely to us all.

... Therefore was Joseph fair in appearance, and goodly to look upon, because there dwelt not in him any wickedness for in trouble of the spirit the face declare it. (Benner)

The Jewish Encyclopedia translates the last verse as: “since there was no wickedness in him, nor had the **evil eye** any power over him”. (Toy, Conybeare and Kohler)

D. Greek

Plutarch (46 – 120 AD), a Greek historian and Roman citizen, wrote that certain men’s eyes could bring harm to babies and young animals. (Gregory and Tintori)

The evil eye was mentioned by Greek authors from at least the 7th century BC. (Fiensy) Because of the obsessive fear of the evil eye, Greek letter writers customarily began their salutations as follows:

“Before all things I pray that you are in good health and not harmed by the **evil eye**.” (Moulton)

Before he became a bishop, the Greek writer Heliodorus of Emesa (3rd century AD) wrote a romance novel, *Aethiopica* (*The Ethiopian Story*). In *Aethiopica* 3.7-9, a character speaks: “When one looks at what is excellent with **an evil eye** he fills the surrounding atmosphere with a pernicious quality and transmits his own envenomed exhalations into whatever is nearest to him”. (Nanos)

E. Roman

Cicero, Virgil and Pliny mentioned the evil eye in their writings. (Gregory and Tintori) In *Flaccus* 29, Philo (20 – 50 AD), an Alexandrian Jew and Roman citizen, alleged: “the Egyptian is by nature **an evil-eyed** person, and the citizens burst with envy and considered that any good fortune to others was misfortune to themselves” (Malina)

In *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder (23 – 79 AD) reported that “some people have poison in their eyes”. (Borsje) He believed that the perpetrator would be unable to sink in water, even if weighed down with clothes. (Elworthy)

Plutarch believed it was apparent that the evil eye inflicted pain on people. (Fiensy) In *Talkativeness* written in 518 BC, Plutarch wrote: “...it is the searching out of troubles that the busybody desires, he is possessed by the affliction called ‘malignancy’, a brother to envy and spite. For envy is pain at another’s good, while malignancy is joy at another’s sorrow.” (Malina). Plutarch’s definition of envy and malignancy describe the destructive nature of the evil eye.

Because it was always possible to meet the *invidus* or the evil eye perpetrator, the ancient Romans wore amulets and painted images on floors or walls that would protect against the evil eye. (Clark) In Greek mythology, Telemachus the son of Odysseus was saved from drowning by a dolphin. Hence, the dolphin was believed to prevent the evil eye and was adapted on the shield of soldiers. (Park M.D.) (Story)

F. Other Civilizations

Though we cannot cover other ancient civilizations in depth, we present a few examples below:

- **Armenia:** The Ancient Armenian state was founded in approximately 2100 BC. (Babayán) As of this writing, we have been unable to locate their ancient texts. All we can do is point to their modern day practices which include: wearing blue beads, carrying prayer scrolls as protection, praying special blessings or using special gestures to prevent the evil eye. (G.L.S.)
- **India:** Pliny reported that the evil eye was “one of the special superstitions of India”. (Crooke) Vedic texts, written between 1700 – 500 BC, contain references to their belief in the evil eye. (Encyclopaedia Iranica) The Hindu belief in the evil eye probably originates in the eye of the Hindu god, Shiva, the Destroyer. (Gonzalez-Wippler) The third eye in the middle of Shiva’s forehead remained closed unless it was provoked whereupon the eye unleashed death and destruction. (Erickson)
- **Mayan.** In Guatemala, they follow the ancient Mayan belief that a stranger can harm an infant or young child with a glance. Hence, parents cover the face of a child when a stranger approaches. (Dendinger)
- **Iran:** Belief in the evil eye is found in ancient Iranian Zoroastrian literature. Iranians have a traditional saying: “The evil eye puts the camel into the pot and mankind into the grave.” (Donaldson)
- **Islam:** The Bedouin have a saying: "The **evil eye** is like a light. You can see it, feel it, be affected by it, or affect others by means of it. It can cause harm or even death in large numbers, but you never succeed in holding it in your hands. This is the will of Allah." Moreover, the Muslims have the *hadith* or teachings written by Islamic church fathers. Below are a few excerpts (Abu-Rabia):
 - Imam Ibn al-Hajjaj (821-875 AD) quoted Muhammad: “The **evil eye** is true, and if there were anything in the world which would overcome Fate, it would be an evil eye.” Thereupon, Mohammed prescribed incantations to prevent the evil eye.
 - Al-Jawziyya (610-632 AD) emphasized that the power of the evil eye came from a spirit and not from the eye of a person.

IV. CHURCH HISTORY

“Fear of the evil eye continued through the Christian era as evidenced by numerous amulets, paintings and mosaics.” (Yamauchi) For example, a 5th century AD hand-shaped amulet from Syria asks God to drive away evil; the inscription on the amulet implied that the hand of Jesus Christ took away pain and took away the fear of devils and evil-eyed men. (Dickie)

A. Early Christian Church Fathers

The Church Father is “anyone who taught orthodox doctrine, possessed holiness of life and had a certain antiquity.” (Fathers of the Church) Writings of the early Church Fathers were shared by the Western and Eastern Church. Their writings were pivotal in shaping church doctrine before the biblical canon was established.

Though we cite Matthew Dickie’s essay, “The Church Fathers and the Evil Eye”, we note that Dickie doubted that the supernatural had anything to do with the evil eye. Dickie assumed that Jesus and Paul didn’t believe in the evil eye. He equated belief in the evil eye to superstitious magic. (Dickie) As previously stated, we disagree with Dickie.

Below is a sampling of the opinions of early Christian church fathers:

- Latin Father, Tertullian (160 – 225 AD), the son of a Roman centurion who converted - Tertullian believed that the evil eye was useful for the devil and God; the devil used it to tarnish what was good while the Lord used it to “humble the proud”. (Dickie)
- Gregory Thaumaturgus (213-270 AD) of Neocaesarea, a bishop in Asia Minor, wrote a homily on Matthew 6:22-23 and explained: “But the **evil eye** is the pretended love, which is also called hypocrisy, by which the whole body of the man is made darkness.” (Thaumaturgus)
- Latin Father, Augustine of Hippo (254 – 430 AD), bishop of Hippo in North Africa and writer of *City of God* - Augustine skirts around the issue of “bewitched” versus “evil eye” by not discussing Gal 3:1, in his commentary on Galatians (Dickie)
- Eusebius Pamphili, Bishop of Caesarea (265 - 340 AD), believed that the devil deceives men into thinking that their misfortunes come from the evil eye gaze of other men or from being flattered. Eusebius was against the use of traditional evil eye charms but was willing for people to use the cross to ward off the evil eye. (Dickie)
- Ambrose of Milan (340 – 397 AD) wrote: “The Father loves the Son, John 5:20 and you anxiously examine His Person; the Father is well pleased in Him, you, joining the Jews, look upon Him with **an evil eye**; the Father knows the Son, and you join the heathen in reviling Him. Luke 23:36-37” (Ambrose)
- Greek Father, John Chrysostom (347-407 AD), the Archbishop of Constantinople, wrote in his *Homilies on Galatians*: “...And when you hear of jealousy in this place, and in the Gospel, of an **evil eye**, which means the same, you must not suppose that the glance of the eye has any natural power to injure those who look upon it. For the eye, that is, the organ itself, cannot be evil; but Christ in that place means jealousy by the term. ...” (Chrysostom)

- Cappadocian Father, Basil (4th century AD), bishop of Caesarea, wrote a homily ‘On Envy’ in 364 AD. Basil didn’t believe that men had the power of the evil eye but that the devil used men. (Limberis)

B. Western Church

In the 4th century AD, the great power schism between the Western Church in Rome and the Eastern Church in Constantinople happened. The break eventually led to each one using a different basis for biblical texts which created some divergence in their teachings. It is argued by some in the Greek Orthodox Church, that while the Western Church relied on Jerome’s Latin Vulgate, the Eastern Church stayed with the original Septuagint text. (Shamir) (Serfes)

The original Septuagint and the Masoretic text form the basis for modern bible translations. If we could make a detailed comparison of both texts, we postulate that we might find the discrepancy in the translation for evil eye. It might be that the belief in the evil eye is determined by the origin of one’s biblical text.

In forming their biblical canon, the Greek Orthodox kept all of the “Apocryphal” books; the Roman Catholic Church kept all but two; and the Protestants dropped them all. Interestingly, the “evil eye” is mentioned frequently in the Apocrypha.

Sirach 31:13 Remember that an **evil eye** is an evil thing: and what is created more wicked than an eye? therefore it weeps upon every occasion.

Wisdom of Solomon 4:12 The **evil eye** of wickedness obscures what is good, and roving desire perverts the innocent mind

There were at least two Roman Catholic Popes who were known as *jettatore* or the perpetrator of the evil eye. Pope Pius IX (1792-1878) was described as, “There was nothing so fatal as his blessing.” (Gifford) Whatever Pope Pius IX blessed turned into a curse: he blessed the Italians who were winning against Austrians—the Italians suddenly lost; he blessed men working on scaffolding at the Piazza di Spagna—one of the workmen fell off the scaffolding and died. (Di Stasi) Another pope, Leo XIII (1810-1903), was the longest living pope and was thought to be *jettatore* because many cardinals died during his reign. (Budge)

On July 2009, the current pope, Pope Benedict XVI, made note of the evil eye in a message about our Merciful God:

“...it is true that we feel a little threatened by the word ‘omnipotence’: it seems to limit our freedom, it seems to be too strong. But we must learn that the omnipotence of God is not an arbitrary power, because God is Good...This eye which looks upon us is not **an evil eye** watching us; it is the presence of love which will never abandon us but rather gives us the certainty that God is being, God is living: it is the eye of love that gives us the air to live. (Benedict XVI)

C. Eastern Church

For the Eastern Church, the period of the Church Fathers ends with John of Damascus (676-749 AD). (Serfes) Their bible text is based on the original Septuagint version which is the version that retains the literal translation of *vaskania* or the evil eye.

In the early Orthodox Church, prayers were said to prevent the evil eye in the Sacrament of Baptism and to exorcize satanic powers in the case of *vaskania*. After the 4th century, the priests took over the exorcist functions from the laity. The Orthodox Book of Prayers includes prayers of exorcism written by Basil and John Chrysostom. (Papademtrioiu)

In modern times, the Greek Orthodox Church believes in demonic possession of persons and objects, but rejects *vaskania* as church doctrine. However, the priestly prayers to prevent the evil eye continue in Baptism and exorcism rites to this day. Prayers on the birth of a child contain this: “Cleanse her of every sin; bring healing from suffering...yea, Lord, from sickness and infirmity, from jealousy and envy, and from the **evil eye**. Have mercy on her and the newborn child according to the greatness of Your mercy...” (Papademtrioiu) The Church tries to discourage the use of amulets and secret rituals. (Koyen)

D. Ethiopian Orthodox Church

The Abyssinians or the ancient Ethiopians always feared the evil eye. (Apostolides and Dreyer) As the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was established in the 4th century AD, an Ethiopian legend was told about the evil eye:

“Jesus and his disciples, when walking by the sea of Tiberias, saw the figure of an old woman sitting on a filthy seat. Her appearance was frightful and terrifying. Her eye glittered like gold, and her hands and her feet were like wheels, and flames of fire sixty-eight cubits long went forth from her mouth. The disciples said: ‘What is this thing, O Lord’

Our Lord said, ‘This is the **eye of the earth, evil and accursed**. When its glance falls upon a ship sailing on the sea, that ship sinks suddenly; when it pursues a horse, it cases down that horse and its rider; when it looks upon a cow that is being milked, it curdles the milk, which turns into blood; when it looks upon a woman with her child, it separates them and destroys them.’ Then Christ uttered the two words ‘Asparapses! Askôrâskîs!’

The disciples slew *Āyemat*, took this eye of the earth, evil and accursed, and burnt her body in the fire, and scattered the ashes to the winds—east, west, south and north—so that the memorial of her might be blotted out from the earth.” (Budge) (Gonzalez-Wippler)

The missionary presence in Africa tended to ignore the supernatural, including the evil eye. The result was a cultural mix in the African church of Western Christian beliefs and African witchcraft. While the neophytes or itinerant priests conducted the exorcism rites to cure the evil eye (Finneran), the ordinary Ethiopian Christians continued to wear amulets like those with the image of the eyes of the Trinity to prevent the evil eye. (Budge)

African culture deals violently with the evil eye. The cultural pattern for other civilizations is for people to avoid the perpetrator; but when they can’t avoid the perpetrator, they wear amulets and try other preventive devices. However, in African culture, the victim becomes a perpetrator by exacting revenge and killing the perpetrator. Further, the cultural pattern for other civilizations is to make amulets out of crystals, wood, horns or metal. In African culture, the *muti* or amulet is made from human body parts. Exorcism in other cultures includes praying and fasting, but in Africa exorcism by the witch doctor includes beating the “evil spirit” out of the victim. (Apostolides and Dreyer)

V. CONCLUSION

We have shown that the definition of the evil eye is understood clearly from scripture when you use the literal translation instead of the modern interpretation of “envy” or “ill will”. The evil eye proceeds from a person’s heart and defiles his whole body. In addition to the evil eye, we have looked at the Good Eye through scripture. The contrast is helpful in understanding how to deal with the problem.

We have illustrated that the problem of the evil eye is as old as recorded history. When the early Church Fathers came on the scene of recorded history, they recognized the evil eye as a demonic problem. While they discouraged the use of amulets, Eusebius and others allowed the use of the cross to ward off the evil eye.

Perhaps the last section on the Ethiopian Coptic Church best describes the dilemma facing the church in dealing with the evil eye. When the Western Church left out the supernatural element, it relegated the evil eye to folklore and superstition. People who are victims of the evil eye are left to fend for themselves by turning to amulets, rituals, witchcraft or the occult. As shown in the Ethiopian Church, the rituals may become violent.

The Greek Orthodox Church at least attempts to address the problem by performing exorcism at baptism and when the victim is aware of the need. But if people in the church are still looking for protection, then perhaps the church needs to find another way to address the belief in the evil eye.

As we close this study, we have several unanswered questions:

1. When and where did the church decide to remove the literal translation of the “evil eye” in favor of “bewitched or envy”? With the break between the Western and Eastern Church, it appears that there was also a break in the understanding of the evil eye. While the Western church calls the evil eye “envy”, the Greek Orthodox Church believes in the exorcism of the evil eye. We postulate that if we do a parallel study of the evil eye verses in ancient biblical texts, we might find our answer.

2. Assuming that the evil eye is spiritual, what satanic influence is behind it? This belief has persisted through many civilizations. Paul tells us in Eph 6:12 that “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (KJV) Could the evil eye be one of those evil influences? The exact nature of the evil eye and the power behind it is still unclear. Could the evil eye be directly connected with the first sin in the Garden of Eden?

VI. APPENDIX: LANGUAGE FOR THE EVIL EYE

"Language shapes the way we think, and determines what we can think about."

--Benjamin Lee Whorf (Hebrew Linguist, 1897-1941) (Benner)

The God that Christians worship is quite different from the Hindu, Muslim, Egyptian, Chinese or Japanese gods, to name a few. Yet while the world cannot agree on the real God, it seems to agree that there is an evil eye since many civilizations felt it necessary to create a word to capture this concept.

This belief has been traced to sixty-seven cultures and is similar across cultures. (Apostolides and Dreyer) For example, the belief in the evil eye is common in "Siam, Burma, Tibet, Korea, Malay, Malacca, Sumatra, Tahiti, Samoa, Greenland, Alaska, Nicaragua, Mexico, British Guiana, Brazil, Peru, lands of the Bantu peoples, the Bushmen and Pygmies, parts of Australia and New Guinea". (Dr. Seligmann) We compiled the following languages and/or anecdotes from sources available to us at this time.

Country/ Language	Translation	Anecdotes	Source
Albania		They use a scarecrow (<i>dordolec</i> or <i>kukull</i>) to protect wealth.	(Peterson-Bidoshi)
Arabic	<i>Ain al hasoud</i> or <i>Ayn haarrah</i>		(Abu-Rabia)
Argentina	<i>la ojeadura</i>	In San Juan, Argentina, parents pin a red ribbon to the baby's clothing to prevent the evil eye	(Garcia)
Armenia	<i>paterak</i>	Armenians pin a blue bead to a baby's clothing to prevent the evil eye	(Budge) (Dresser)
Bangladesh		Bengali have 72-hour non-stop celebration held between March-April chiefly to ward off the evil eye	(Chanting the Lord's Name to ward off evil eye)
Bedouin	<i>aradh</i> for perpetrator; <i>ardhan</i> for victim	Parents hang blue beads or <i>kushshash</i> (for "kick out the evil eye") on a boy's head, believing that boys are more susceptible than girls to the evil eye. The rites of exorcism of the evil eye is performed by women.	(Abu-Rabia)
China	<i>ok ngan</i> or <i>ok, sihi</i>		(Budge)
Corsica	<i>innochiatura</i>		(Budge)
Denmark	<i>et ondt øje</i>		(Budge)
Egypt		Cairo: On the first day of filming, producers of <i>Asmahan</i> , a TV series dramatising the life of an Arab legendary singer, slaughtered a cow - a tradition in Egypt to dispel the evil eye.	(Controversial television series <i>Asmahan</i> faces court battle)
El Salvador	<i>"mal de"</i> - in common usage drops the <i>"ojo"</i>		(Students)
Ethiopia	<i>Ayfe Celu</i> (the look of an eye); <i>Buda</i> or <i>Tayb</i> [those who possess evil eye]	The Amhara tribe believe that <i>buda</i> , an outcast artisan class, by his very nature must "eat others with his eyes".	(Di Stasi) (Finneran) (Reminick)
France	<i>mauvais oeil</i> or <i>mauvais regard</i>		(Budge)
Germany	<i>übel ougen</i> or <i>böse Blick</i>	<i>Judenblick</i> or Jewish glance was a medieval German word for evil eye because it was believed that all Jews were perpetrators.	(Maloney)
Greek	<i>Matiasma</i> , <i>buskania</i> , <i>vaskania</i> or <i>mati</i>	<i>Matiasma</i> literally means "eye" and refers to someone unintentionally being a perpetrator. <i>Vaskania</i> means "to kill with the eye" intentionally.	(Apostolides and Dreyer)

Hebrew	<i>Ayin ha'ra or ayin tsarah</i> , ["Eye of evil" or "narrow eye"]; Yiddish: <i>Kein Ayin Hara</i> ["no evil eye"]	evil eye is listed as a single idea in the Ben Yehuda dictionary; <i>Kein ayin hara</i> or "no evil eye" is customarily added after praising another; expressing wish that the evil eye should not affect the individual discussed.	(Ben Yehuda)
Holland	<i>booze blik</i>		(Budge)
Hungary	<i>szemverés</i>		(Budge)
India	<i>Drishtidosham</i> or <i>Buri nazar</i> ; <i>raag</i> [Jaunsari term]; <i>dankan</i> or <i>daain</i> [Jaunsari witch with power of evil-eye]	Warded off with an amulet called <i>Aarti</i> . Jaunsair, a tribe in India:	(Sinh)
Iran/Persia	<i>Casm-Zakm</i> [literally, "a blow by the eye"]; <i>cheshm-zakhm</i> ; <i>Nam-e Khoda</i> ["Salty eye"] or <i>aghashi</i> ; Farsi <i>bla band</i>	Farzim described an evil eye wall ornament as a pottery inscribed with Koranic verses and a design with a blue eye in the center, surrounded by 2 circles, one blue and the other, white; the ornament is placed near the entryway so that visitors focus on this when first entering; to cure the evil eye, Farzim said that someone would read something, then blow like releasing a word, then bad or good things might happen.	(Abu-Rabia) (Casm-Zakm) (Students)
Ireland	<i>droch-shuil, suil milledach</i>	Balor, the evil-eyed king of Fomoiré, is a famous character in Irish literature.	(Budge)
Italian	<i>Mal occhio, oculi maligni, jettatore</i> [a person who possesses the power of the evil eye]	Italians use gold chain and cross or <i>il corno</i> (horn), or red to protect themselves, eg. red ribboned horseshoes. People believed that the evil eye of a hungry guest can poison one's food; hence, never eat in front of another without insisting they eat with you.	(Di Stasi) (Gregory and Tintori)
Maasai	<i>inkonyek</i> [people with eyes]	Nomadic tribe in Kenya and Tanzania; the <i>inkonyek</i> can see through other people's bodies; because of rumors, the Maasai equated cameras with X-rays; and when tourists took photographs of them, the Maasai assumed they were all perpetrators.	(Monbiot)
Malta	<i>ghajn</i>		(Baldacchino)
Mexico	<i>Mal de ojo</i>	The Huichol Indians have an eye amulet called <i>Ojo de Dios</i> to prevent the evil eye.	(Gonzalez-Wippler) (Students)
Norway	<i>skjoertunge</i>		(Budge)
Pakistan		Since 2008 when he was elected into office, Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari has had a black goat slaughtered almost daily to ward off the evil eye from his administration.	(Zardari sacrifices a black goat daily to ward off evil eye)
Philippines	<i>Manga-ga-mud</i>	Note that the Filipino word for doctor is <i>manggagamot</i> --which seems to be a derivative of the evil eye word.	(Moran R.N.)
Poland	<i>zte oko; oko proroka</i>		(Budge)
Russian	<i>Sglaz</i> [literally, "spoiling"]		(Wigzell)
Rwanda	<i>mauvais oeil</i>		(Students)
Sardinia	<i>ogu malu</i>		(Budge)
Scandinavia		13th Century Icelandic saga tells that before 2 magicians were executed, bags were placed over their heads to prevent their use of evil eye.	(Adalsteinsson)
Scotland	<i>ill Ee; droch shuil</i>		(Budge)
Spain	<i>Mal de ojo</i>	In Spain, it is customary to wish another diner, "Buen Provecho", so that the other person is assured that you're not envious of his meal.	(Phillips)
Syria	<i>aina bishâ</i>		(Budge)
Tuareg	<i>Tehot</i>	nomadic tribe in Sahara, North Africa	(Phillips)
Turkey	<i>nazar</i>	In 2004, the national airline used the evil eye as their aircraft livery (scheme painted on jet tails)	(Gregory and Tintori) (Fly Air Turkey: Turkish Airlines)
Vedas	<i>ghoram caksuh</i>		(Budge)
Yiddish	<i>Eyn ha-ral</i>	Tack on the phrase <i>Kein Ayin Hara</i> or "no evil eye" after praising someone.	(Posner)

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End Notes

ⁱ H7489 רעע רע'א' A primitive root; properly to spoil (literally by breaking to pieces); figuratively to make (or be) good for nothing, that is, bad (physically, socially or morally). (associate selves and show self friendly are by mistake for H7462.): - afflict, associate selves [by mistake for H7462], break (down, in pieces), + displease, (be, bring, do) evil (doer, entreat, man), show self friendly [by mistake for H7462], do harm, (do) hurt, (behave self, deal) ill, X indeed, do mischief, punish, still vex, (do) wicked (doer, -ly), be (deal, do) worse. (Strong)

ⁱⁱ H7451 רע רעה רע' râ'âh From H7489; bad or (as noun) evil (naturally or morally). This includes the second (feminine) form; as adjective or noun: - adversity, affliction, bad, calamity, + displease (-ure), distress, evil ([-favouredness], man, thing), + exceedingly, X great, grief (-vous), harm, heavy, hurt (-ful), ill (favoured), + mark, mischief, (-vous), misery, naught (-ty), noisome, + not please, sad (-ly), sore, sorrow, trouble, vex, wicked (-ly, -ness, one), worse (-st) wretchedness, wrong. (Strong)

ⁱⁱⁱ G4190 πονηρός ponēros: From a derivative of G4192; hurtful, that is, evil (properly in effect or influence, and thus differing from G2556, which refers rather to essential character, as well as from G4550, which indicates degeneracy from original virtue); figuratively calamitous; also (passively) ill, that is, diseased; but especially (morally) culpable, that is, derelict, vicious, facinorous; neuter (singular) mischief, malice, or (plural) guilt; masculine (singular) the devil, or (plural) sinners: - bad, evil, grievous, harm, lewd, malicious, wicked (-ness). (Strong)

^{iv} G940 βασκαίνω baskainō Akin to G5335; to *malign*, that is, (by extension) to fascinate (by false representations): - bewitch.

^v Rev 4:8 And the four living creatures each one had six wings around, and within being full of eyes.

^{vi} KTU refers to *Keilalphabetische Texte aus Ugarit*, the French edition used by scholars for Ugaritic text. (Quartz Hill School of Theology)

^{vii} Calaway cited Dennis Pardee who translated RS 22.225. RS refers to the excavation number for the clay tablets discovered in the Ras Shamra site (the current location of Ugarit), Syria. Pardee used RS instead of KTU.

^{viii} Edfu or Idfu was the capital of Upper Egypt, but is now part of a Greek City.

^{ix} *Berakhot* or *Berakah* or Benedictions were formalized over the course of time in the Talmud.