What Is Paganism?

Understanding General Revelation and the Lucifer Story

by

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"And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, "We have sinned against you, because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals." And the Lord said to the people of Israel, "Did I not save you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines? **12** The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, and you cried out to me, and I saved you out of their hand. Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods; therefore I will save you no more. Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress." And the people of Israel said to the Lord, "We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to you. Only please deliver us this day." So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord, and he became impatient over the misery of Israel" Judges 10: 10-16.

Judgment and Repentance

The Book of Judges shows us the pattern of apostasy and judgment that the Christian Church still faces today. In Judges, the people of God compromised and eventually adopted wholesale the paganism of the nations around them. They revealed the darkness of their own hearts and their lack of love for God. Their weak faith was exposed by their failure to know and understand Him.

In response, God handed them over to judgment—not to destroy them, but to chastise them and call them to repentance. They were meant to set aside the vain imaginations of idolatry and seek the true and living God. They had been called out of the world of unbelief and to instead fill the earth with the knowledge of God. Instead, they got comfortable among the unbelievers and adopted their ways.

Christians have often followed this same pattern. Today, when Christians lament the weakness of the faith and the decline of Christianity in the West, they are witnessing the judgment of God and its many effects. Yet, just as in Judges 10, Christians must be confronted with the seriousness of their sin and must repent.

From academics to laypeople, many Christians have adopted core elements of the pagan system—its view of "god" and its Luciferian savior myth. In this essay, I will explain what paganism is, with the goal of showing the depth of our compromise and the need for heartfelt repentance and a return to the truths revealed by God in all of His works.

What is Paganism?

When you say the word paganism, it conjures different images depending on your cultural background. For those raised in the 1980s, it may trigger flashbacks to the "satanic panic"—an era when concerned parents warned their children not to read comic books, listen to rock 'n' roll, or watch movies like Poltergeist. In retrospect, those parents may have been right after all. But that is a discussion for another time.

As a professor of Religious Studies, when I use the terms pagan or paganism, I am referring to something far more historically and philosophically substantial than stage theatrics, horror films, or tabloid sensationalism. I am not speaking of the overt and performative version of paganism—Ozzy Osbourne on stage biting the head off a bat, or self-proclaimed occultists conjuring the ghost of Aleister Crowley. Whether or not you consider that a viable career path is beside the point.

What I mean by paganism is a belief system—or more precisely, a broad family of belief systems—that stands in fundamental opposition to the biblical worldview. To identify and evaluate what is or is not paganism, one must understand both systems clearly: the biblical and the pagan. This requires a level of conceptual clarity often lacking in popular discourse. A person who is trained only to respond to surface-level impressions or cultural associations will not classify these systems correctly. Instead, we must think in terms of beliefs—about their starting points, their internal coherence, and their ultimate goals.

The key point for this study is to understand the clarity of general revelation and the inexcusability of unbelief. The pagans are in culpable ignorance about God and his law. They could and should have known the truth from general revelation. Instead, they erected an entire system to oppose the truths of God and suppress its teaching. To do this they still relied on many concepts also used in Christianity, but that is because they exist in God's world.

To say their use of concepts, like love and wisdom, proves they are getting things right is like saying because they exist they are getting things right. They can't help but exist, they were created by God. And they can't help but think about concepts like what is eternal and what is good because those are aspects of being. But they emptied these concepts of their correct meaning and then used their falsehoods to oppose belief in the true and living God.

The basic questions we ask and can answer from general revelation are:

1. What is eternal?
2. How do I know?
3. What is the highest value?

Each of these have sub-questions such as logic, politics, beauty, and more. Answering these three basic questions helps us categorize any artist or philosopher we encounter insofar as they have a system aimed at coherence.

Clarity means we don't confuse concepts. We don't say that something which had a beginning and is changing is also eternal (without beginning). Or something that is not an end in itself is the highest good. We don't confuse what is eternal and without beginning with the creation which had a beginning. God is eternal and the world is temporal. Romans 1:18-25. We use Reason to understand what is clear. At its core, paganism is a denial of Reason.

General Revelation

Here I am stating what can be known about God and man from general revelation. In other places I have provided proof of this. What can be known about God from general revelation: We can know that God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

The incommunicable attributes are the basis for the aseity of God and the impossibility of humans ever becoming God—that comes up in paganism.

We can know that the world/cosmos did not exist from eternity. We can know we (individually and all humans) did not exist from eternity.

We can know that humans are body/soul unity who are finite, temporal, and changeable in being, wisdom, power, holiness, goodness, justice, and truth.

What can be known about the moral law from general revelation. We can know wisdom begins with the fear of God. We can know that the greatest commandment is to love God. And we can know the content and application of each of the 10 Commandments.

We can know that virtues must aim at the correct highest good or they become vices. Having courage and diligence to do evil is not virtuous.

We can know all of this propositionally and by inference from the nature of things, not by intuition or direct perception. The knowledge of God is mediate: God is known through his works.

What Pagans Do and Do Not Believe

First, what do the pagans believe? We must start here to show how far short they fell short of the glory of God in general revelation.

Paganism does not mean, or is not limited to, being selfish. It is not limited to overt occult practices. It is not limited to those wearing upside down crosses, dressed in gothic garb, and sleeping in a coffin.

Pagans were not without piety. They revered the gods and practiced religious rituals. They often believed in a supreme deity, or at least a highest god within a pantheon. They had moral codes, honored love and friendship (however differently understood), and were willing to work hard and even die for what they held sacred. They believed in an afterlife. In fact, many thought that this life was but a shadow and that the true, beautiful, and eternal realm lay beyond. They told stories to pass on wisdom, consulted oracles for divine guidance, and sought out sages, heroes, or savior figures to lead them to something higher. They valued virtue and wisdom, and longed for transformation.

Pagans can have personal stories that have inspiring elements. They live in God's world. They have the formal concepts of knowledge, holiness, and righteousness. They can show courage and honor in pursuing their version of these. But their version of these is a rejection of God's truth. It is a culpably distorted picture of the reality. It is like saying since Lucifer works tirelessly toward his goals he is a good example of a Christian work

ethic and has the virtue of perseverance. His work ethic and virtue of perseverance are aimed at the wrong end and so cause harm. The same is true of pagan virtue which becomes for them a vice in their unbelief.

Christians who see paganism as telling the Christian narrative confuse concepts and content. When they see that a pagan myth has good guys who struggle and suffer to fight evil they think "that's Christian." No, those are concepts all humans have in virtue of being able to think. What matters is the content of what they think is good and evil. Leonidas fought and gave his life to defend Sparta's idols. That shows more bravery than the drunkard who can't stay sober long enough to defend anything. But he wasn't brave enough to confront his or Sparta's sin. His bravery ensured he died an idolator alienated from God.

In other words, paganism was not nihilistic or without meaning (at first, although it descends there). It was not materialistic atheism (it is atheism). It was a rich and complex worldview—often deeply religious, often admirable in its own way but finally tragic in a culpable way (thinking themselves wise, they became fools).

And this is precisely where the confusion begins for many modern Christians. Upon seeing these similarities—references to a supreme deity, or to salvation, or to virtue and wisdom—many are tempted to write books with titles like The Gospel in Paganism or Plato: A Christian Before Christ. But this is a conceptual meaning mistake.

We must learn to recognize that the same words—"God," "love," "salvation," "afterlife," "wisdom"—can have very different meanings depending on the belief system in which they are embedded. A term like "savior" in a Stoic or Neoplatonic context does not carry the same connotation it does in the Gospels. "Supreme deity" in the mouth of Aristotle is not equivalent to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

This is what I call philosophical ambiguity: not the kind of ambiguity that arises from unclear speech or sloppy grammar, but the kind that emerges when a term is used across different philosophical systems with fundamentally different meanings. The appearance of agreement masks the reality of divergence. The supposedly same concept has very different, even opposite, meaning.

In order to discern true from false, wisdom from folly, we must train ourselves to identify these philosophical distinctions. Paganism is not merely a collection of outdated superstitions; it is a way of thinking about the world, about the divine, about the good life, and about what ultimately saves us. And unless we understand that, we are liable to either dismiss it too easily—or worse, absorb it uncritically.

Paganism Is Not Preparation for the Gospel

Second, one of the most persistent misunderstandings about paganism is the notion that it somehow prepares the way for the gospel. This view, often found in romanticized treatments of classical mythology or in comparative religion textbooks, imagines that pagan philosophy, myth, or ritual acted as a kind of forerunner to Christianity. The idea is that truth was gradually unveiled to humanity through evolving religious insight—first animism, then polytheism, then philosophical monotheism, culminating in the full light of Christianity. This view overlaps with the evolutionary model of religion or what I call the Voltron version of God (they eventually added up their many small gods into one big God—the view of David Hume).

According to this model, early humans began by worshiping spirits of nature, then developed pantheons of gods to account for the complexities of life, and eventually synthesized these divine figures into one abstract "God"—something like a philosophical apex predator composed of all previous deities. Christianity is then seen as the final and most sophisticated expression of this natural religious instinct. On this view, paganism is not a mistake, but an earlier draft. It is seen as preparatory, even necessary—a shadow of things to come.

But biblically and philosophically, this view is deeply mistaken.

The truth is not that humanity began in religious ignorance and gradually discovered God, but that humanity began with the true knowledge of God and deliberately rejected it. According to both Scripture and general revelation, there was an original monotheism—true knowledge of the one, living, personal Creator. But, as Romans 1 makes clear, humanity suppressed this knowledge in unrighteousness. Rather than worship the true God, they "exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things" (Rom. 1:23). Paganism, then, is not a step toward the gospel—it is a descent away from it. It is not preparation for the light; it is the willful preference for darkness.

Special revelation, in the form of the biblical narrative, tells us how God acts in history to redeem those trapped in the darkness of unbelief. The gospel is not the fulfillment of pagan longing, but the rescue of those who have turned their backs on what was clearly revealed about God. To treat paganism as a benign anticipation of Christ is to ignore the depth of human rebellion. The rebellion is not limited to immoral actions but includes fundamentally false beliefs about God and what is good.

It is true that pagan religions often contain symbols that resemble biblical themes. One might find stories of dying and rising gods, virgin mothers, divine messengers, or paradisiacal afterlives. But the resemblance is not because paganism anticipated Christianity. Rather, these symbols are the decayed and distorted remnants of divine truth in scripture—specifically, of truths once known and then twisted through centuries of unbelief.

Take, for instance, the archetype of the mother and child found in many pagan traditions. This is not a foreshadowing of the incarnation, but a corrupted cultural memory of the promise given in Genesis 3:15—that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. After the judgment at Babel, humanity was scattered and the memory of God's promise fragmented and filtered through fallen minds. The result was the monomyth of unbelief: a basic story shape that echoes faint and distorted concepts while overlaying them with false content and idolatry.

These echoes of Eden—of a lost paradise, a coming savior, a divine conflict—can be found throughout world mythologies. But they do not represent preparation for the gospel. They represent rebellion against it. Paganism does not climb toward the truth; it turns from the truth and walks backward into the darkened mind. Paganism is the inversion of God's revelation.

Pagan Language Reflects the Image of God—and Its Rejection

A third point needs to be made in response to those who see common ground between paganism and biblical faith: the shared use of religious language—words like god, virtue, salvation, afterlife, and wisdom—does not imply theological agreement or continuity. That pagans employ similar themes is not evidence that they were

moving toward the truth or awaiting special revelation. Rather, it reflects a deeper anthropological fact: all human beings are made in the image of God and live in the world God created. Because of this, they cannot escape certain fundamental realities—moral law, longing for meaning, the need for love and hope, the awareness of the divine—even when they seek to suppress or distort them.

We can describe the image of God in the broader and narrower sense. The broader sense is that humans are finite, temporal, and changeable in being, wisdom, power, holiness, goodness, justice, and truth. This definition preserves the aseity of God but also shows that humans share attributes with God. Pagans also share the broader image and so their literature includes these but distorts them.

The narrower aspect of the image of God is knowledge, holiness, and righteousness. Humans always have these in a finite, temporal, and changeable way. Pagans value these but also distort them. Their teaching on theosis or deification says we become God/gods by having their version of these. Stepping over the line from "made in the image of God" to "you can be God" is a simple way to remember where paganism departs and help you stay on guard against its temptation and confusion.

This shared vocabulary arises not from shared theological insight, but from shared accountability and their unbelief. As Paul argues in Romans 1, the knowledge of God is clearly revealed in creation. God's eternal power and divine nature are evident to all, leaving no one with excuse. The problem is not ignorance but rebellion. The human heart, in its fallen condition, is not sincerely seeking after God while doing the best it can. "There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God" (Rom. 3:11). Their ignorance is not innocent but culpable. "Their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom. 1:21).

Pagan Philosophy

Pagan religion and philosophy are thus not neutral or benign attempts to reach toward the divine. They are the cultural and intellectual expression of unbelief. They are attempts to reconstruct reality on terms other than those given by the Creator. The pagan worldview is not a preliminary draft of the gospel, but a rival system built upon the suppression of God's general revelation. And just as nations have histories, so does unbelief.

The so-called Axial Age—a term coined to describe the period roughly between 800 and 200 BC, during which major philosophical and religious systems arose in China, India, Greece, and Israel—illustrates this point well. As human societies became more stable and interconnected, intellectual elites began to formalize, defend, and propagate their respective worldviews. Pagan philosophers emerged not to abandon idolatry, but to justify and refine it. They offered systematic explanations for the religious traditions of their cultures and gave analytical expression to the underlying myths.

Despite their cultural differences, these systems converged around certain core themes, which may be recognized as components of the pagan monomyth—a shared narrative structure common to many pre-Christian belief systems. These include:

1. A supreme deity who is distant, impersonal, or inaccessible. This deity is the source of being or the highest principle, but is not personally involved with the world. It may be conceived as the One (Plotinus), the Unmoved Mover (Aristotle), Brahman (in Advaita Vedanta), or simply Heaven (in

Confucianism).

2. A host of lesser deities, spirits, or intermediaries—angels, daemons, demiurges—who mediate between the divine and human realms. These are the active agents in the world, guiding or obstructing human destiny.

3. A moral framework tied to cosmic order. Humans are to live in harmony with the universe, cultivate virtue, and avoid impiety. However, this is generally a works-based system: salvation (or liberation) is earned through knowledge, asceticism, or ritual purity.

4. A conception of the afterlife as a series of trials, purgations, or reincarnations, through which the soul must ascend the chain of being—eventually attaining reunion with the impersonal divine. The journey is difficult, and only the wise, virtuous, or initiated are capable of reaching the highest good.

This is not preparation for the gospel. It is a sophisticated substitute for it—a reimagining of reality in which God is either redefined or removed. In this way, the philosophers of the Axial Age were not spiritual forerunners to the apostles, but spiritual architects of a rival system.

Contrasting the Pagan and Christian Narratives

To understand the fundamental difference between paganism and Christianity, we must compare their respective narratives of reality—especially their accounts of creation, matter, evil, and redemption. At the core of each system lies a radically different vision of God, the world, and the human condition.

In the pagan narrative, the supreme deity is not the sole, eternal being. Instead, the deity exists alongside other eternal realities—especially matter. Matter is not created out of nothing, but co-eternal with the divine. It exists as a kind of raw, chaotic substance, awaiting form and order. The supreme deity—whether conceptualized as Nous, the One, or some other metaphysical principle—is responsible for shaping or organizing this eternal matter, much like a potter molds clay. Yet because the matter itself is uncreated, it retains an independent principle of resistance—the One is not completely sovereign over matter and matter can resist the will of the One. It is not evil in a moral sense, but it is marked by limitation, mutability, and imperfection. The best that can be achieved is the imitation of higher forms or ideals; perfection is never fully attained in the material realm.

To further distance the supreme deity from the "messiness" of the material world, pagan systems frequently introduce intermediary beings—lesser gods, angels, daemons, or demiurges—who carry out the acts of creation and providence. These beings are close enough to matter to shape it, yet distinct enough from the highest deity to maintain his transcendence. In Neoplatonism, for instance, the One emanates Nous, which emanates Soul, which then shapes the cosmos. Similarly, in Gnostic systems, a lower deity—the demiurge—creates the world in ignorance or defiance of the true god.

Evil, in this framework, is not a result of personal sin or rebellion against a holy Creator. Rather, it is an inherent feature of embodiment and materiality. The soul's imprisonment in flesh is viewed as a tragedy, or at best a necessary step in a long ascent toward disembodied perfection. Salvation is thus redefined as escape: a process of purgation, enlightenment, or reincarnation by which the soul frees itself from the body and returns to the

immaterial realm of the divine. Salvation is healing and growth rather than justification, sanctification, and glorification.

This is where one of the most striking inversions occurs. In many pagan and esoteric traditions, there is a story in which a god or creator imposes laws and restrictions on humanity—binding them to ignorance, servitude, or bodily existence. Opposing this deity is another figure, often portrayed as a bringer of light, knowledge, or liberation. This "light bearer" promises freedom from the tyranny of the lawgiver, encouraging humanity to cast off their chains and ascend toward higher spiritual truth.

This mythic motif is sometimes called the Lucifer Hero Story, and it is a direct inversion of Genesis 3. In Scripture, the serpent tempts Eve with the promise that she will be "like God, knowing good and evil," suggesting that God's command is not protective but repressive. Lucifer says that God lied and that by eating they will become their own Gods. This is the promise of paganism: you can be as God yourself.

At the heart of the pagan worldview lies a promise: that through secret knowledge, mystical power, and heroic defiance, humanity can attain wisdom, transcend death, and return to the divine. Paganism casts its central figure as the light-bearer hero—a bringer of enlightenment who challenges the rule of a dark or distant god. This figure, whether Prometheus, Osiris, or Lucifer, offers not repentance and reconciliation, but hidden knowledge and spiritual ascent.

Or consider James Gunn's Superman. Superman in general follows the Lucifer hero pattern. But in this specific version, the divine father sends his son to earth to rule over it and to teach the simpleminded humans how to live the right way. Superman rebels against this and instead insists that a good life is one of freedom to make mistakes and do whatever you want as long as you aren't hurting another.

The pagan world is "enchanted": truth is not revealed openly in clarity, but whispered through oracles that speak in riddles, hidden in symbols that require decoding, and embodied in rituals that are not signs pointing beyond themselves but are believed to contain real power. There is no distinction between type and fulfillment, between symbol and substance. For the pagan, the rite is the reality. Magical objects are imbued with intrinsic power; ceremonies manipulate divine forces; words possess creative potency apart from the will of a personal Creator.

Some, like Charles Taylor, disillusioned with Modernity, claim that "re-enchanting" the world by going back to Medieval folklore will solve the problems of the modern man. But it didn't work the first time, and knowing what we now know it will certainly not work again. Charles Taylor asks, "why did atheism increase after the Reformation" and offers a return to the Medieval as a solution. But if we were to go to the Medieval world and do a survey, we would find much greater "practical atheism," meaning that the people's false beliefs about God were much worse and they knew nothing about the content of the Bible as it was hidden from them by the Roman Church. True "re-enchantment" does not involves believing in faeries, it involves finding the revelation of God in all of his works.

In this framework, physical death is the oppressive decree of a jealous or ignorant god—a god who binds human beings to matter and limits their potential. Pagan myths often portray this deity as the god of death itself. In contrast, the light-bearing hero offers an alternative path: freedom from death through gnosis (secret knowledge), initiation, and inner awakening. He may suffer or even be struck down by the god of death—Zeus

punishing Prometheus and Hephaestus, or Set killing Osiris—but he returns, resurrected or transfigured. He is the Phoenix who was cast out but rises again. His return is not for the purpose of reconciling humanity to the Creator, but to liberate them from Him.

In this vision, death is not something calling humans to repent. Pagans seek a way around death and repentance by framing death as a gateway or escape from material existence. Paganism teaches that death is merely a transition into higher spiritual reality. This life is viewed as a shadow, a prison, or an illusion. The goal is not resurrection of the body and eternal life in a restored creation, but disembodied ascent. The soul, having descended from a higher realm and become entangled in matter, must now ascend again—through purgation, initiation, and spiritual effort—toward union with the divine.

Paganism teaches its followers to view creation/material existence as a punishment. They say it is a "shadowland" and wish to flee to a pure spiritual disembodied state. This is perhaps the greatest insult to God the Creator. His work of creation is insulted and his call to repent in physical death is avoided and dismissed as evil. That the world is now under the curse does not in any way lesson that it is full of the glory of God. The pagan solution to God's curse is to say it is a hindrance to the good life. They "work to be at leisure." This is called "contemplationism." The rich and landed elite withdraw from society and spend their time contemplating the pure realm of ideas and longing to be out of material existence.

The pagan beatific vision is the soul's ontological union with the divine. In the afterlife, the soul "sees" God in itself by direct vision and absorption. Here the esoteric, "next-level" teaching is revealed: the human soul is eternal. It has forgotten its origin, lost its way, and become trapped in the world of matter. Salvation is remembering and reclaiming its true identity as divine. This is not salvation through forgiveness and adoption, but apotheosis—the soul becoming god.

This is why so many pagan themes seem familiar to the Christian reader. They borrow the concepts—god, sin, savior, death, resurrection, glory—but invert their meaning. Paganism is not irreligion; it is false religion. It uses the architecture of God's world to construct a temple of rebellion. It offers stories that pull at the heartstrings, that speak to real human longings—our desire for justice, beauty, immortality, transformation. And for that reason, these stories are powerful. They have been the primary means by which pagan thought has been disseminated: not through abstract argument (it is ultimately inconsistent), but through narrative, myth, and image.

And tragically, many today—including professing Christians—have imbibed this alternative gospel without realizing it. They believe in some version of God, light, salvation, and eternity, but the content of their belief follows the pagan pattern, not the biblical one. They have not been converted from paganism; they have baptized it by giving its story Christian names. Equipped with this description of pagan thought you will now see that this Lucifer hero story is the plot of most movies and fantasy books today.

The Biblical Account

By contrast to the pagan story of confusion, suppression, and inversion, the biblical worldview begins with clarity—the clarity of general revelation. Unlike paganism, which begins with a distant, impersonal god and an eternal, chaotic cosmos, Scripture teaches that God is personal, near, and active. The world is not eternal alongside God, nor the result of struggle or accident. It is the good creation of the sovereign and wise Creator who continues to providentially rule today.

General revelation tells us that God exists, that He is eternal, powerful, wise, and good, and that we are His creatures. "The heavens declare the glory of God," says Psalm 19, and Paul affirms in Romans 1 that "what can be known about God is plain… because God has shown it." All of God's works—both in creation and providence—proclaim His divine nature. This is the foundational truth that paganism denies.

We can and should use general revelation to expose the falsehoods of paganism. God is not distant, unknowable, or impersonal. He did not use lesser beings to shape pre-existent matter. He spoke, and all things came into being. And what He made was very good. The material world is not a prison, nor a flawed shadow of ideal forms. It is the real, ordered, and beautiful creation of a good and purposeful God. We are not eternal and do not reincarnate.

The problem with the world is not matter, but sin. Evil begins not in the structure of reality but in the human heart. It begins with unbelief—a suppression of what is clearly revealed—and it manifests as disobedience. The inherent consequence of sin is alienation from God, a rupture in our relationship with the source of life and goodness. This spiritual death is not imposed by a petty tyrant but is the inevitable result of cutting ourselves off from our Creator. Spiritual death reveals the perfect justice of God.

God, in His mercy, imposes natural evil (old age, sickness, and death, as well as toil and strife all of which is magnified at times into war, famine, and plague)—not as an arbitrary punishment, but as a merciful call to repentance. Pain, suffering, and ultimately physical death serve as reminders that something is wrong and that we must turn back. The curse is not a denial of God's goodness, but a demonstration of His mercy, calling us to reconsider the path of rebellion.

But God's justice is not His only attribute. The biblical narrative unfolds the astonishing truth that God is also merciful. Though His justice demands that sin be punished, His mercy provides a way for sinners to be reconciled to Him. And here, the story moves from general revelation to special revelation.

From the beginning, God promised redemption. In Genesis 3:15, even as He pronounced judgment, He foretold that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. This is the first announcement of the gospel: that God would provide a substitute, one who would bear the penalty of sin and restore what was lost. As Scripture progresses, the identity of this Redeemer becomes clearer—through the sacrificial system, the promises to Abraham and David, the prophecies of Isaiah—until it is revealed in full that the Lamb of God is none other than the incarnate Son of God.

Only He can meet the requirements of both perfect justice and perfect mercy. As God, He alone can offer infinite payment. As man, He alone can represent us as a sinless substitute. The cross is not a mythic echo of a dying and rising god—it is the real historical event in which God's justice and mercy meet. And unlike the

pagan escape from death into abstraction or absorption, the Christian hope is bodily resurrection and life in a renewed creation.

Even now, under the curse, the world is still full of the glory of God. The curse itself is a gracious interruption, a summons to reconsider, repent, and be reconciled. The dead do not ascend through esoteric stages into divinity—they await judgment or resurrection. History is not cyclical or illusory; it is linear and meaningful. It is the arena of the great conflict between belief and unbelief. And in the end, belief triumphs. "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14).

The culmination of this story is not apotheosis but reconciliation. Not the soul becoming God, but the bride being united with her Redeemer in the wedding supper of the Lamb. This is the beatific vision not of absorption, but of everlasting joy in the presence of the Triune God. We glorify God and enjoy forever by knowing Him in all that by which He is revealed, in all His works of creation and providence. Paganism teaches its follower to flee the creation, the Bible teaches that the creation reveals the glory of God.

The Christian does not work to be at leisure to escape material existence and the curse. The Christian loves to work as it brings glory to God. The Sabbath is not the pagan leisure, but a day set aside as holy by God for the public and private worship of God. After the fall, the Sabbath is a reminder that good overcomes evil and the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of God (it is always filled with the glory of God). The Christian's meditation is not comtemplationism but is a meditating on the many wondrous works of God displayed in creation and providence. It is not escape from material existence but instead is the engagement with all that God has done.

Although pagan myths may pull at the heartstrings of the sinner—offering false promises of meaning and transcendence—only the biblical account speaks the truth and provides lasting hope. Paganism is inherently self-contradictory by claiming that what is temporal and created is eternal (Romans 1:22-23). And therefore, does not provide meaning upon analysis. Our desire for meaning can only be found in the true and living God and what he has revealed about himself in his works. And even the unbeliever, made in the image of God, hungers for meaning. That hunger is not satisfied by paganism. It is fulfilled only in the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth.

The Temple and the Way to the Tree of Life

Consider how this looks in the biblical account and the structure of the Temple, compared to pagan temples or esoteric narratives about reincarnation and the Empyrean. The structure of the Temple tells us what the Lamb of God does.

In Genesis 3, God closed the way to Eden by placing cherubim and a flaming sword on the east side to guard the Tree of Life. Not *cherubim with a flaming sword*, but *both* cherubim and a flaming sword. Reflect on the question: "Who is this sword?" Genesis 3:22 causes some to stumble. It says, *"Man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil"* The pagan—or pagan-influenced—reader takes this to mean that man can indeed become God.

Yet that is not what the text says. Man is still temporal (he had a beginning), and God is eternal (without beginning). But man has put himself in the place of God, to determine good and evil. The "knowing" here is *as* God knows—not in authority or essence, but in self-assertion. The verse does not say they will succeed or that this will end well. Rather, it reminds us of what sin is: we claim to know what is good for us apart from what God our Creator tells us. And since man has now put himself in that place, he is denied access to the Tree of Life.

The path back to the Tree of Life is explained in the Temple. This is a clear rejection of deification or theosis as the pagans envision it. Eternal is not to be God or become a God or lose one's identity in God as absorption into the One. Eternal life is to know God and Christ Jesus whom he sent, and we know God as he reveals himself to us in all of his works. That is what drives the pagan to flee this world. They say material existent is impure or even evil, but the truth is that the creation clearly reveals God and they cannot bear to live in the face of that revelation they have rejected.

The Temple was set up with courtyards guarding the holiness of God. The Gentiles could only go so far. Then came the courtyard for the Israelites. After that, only the priests could go to offer sacrifices at the altar. Each day, they could enter the Temple's Holy Place to attend to the lampstand, the showbread, and the incense. The Holy Place was separated from the Most Holy Place by a thick curtain decorated with cherubim.

Once a year, the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place with the blood of the sacrifice, to be placed on the front and east side of the mercy seat—the golden cover of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark itself was also adorned with two cherubim guarding it.

This system continued for centuries, from Moses until Christ. When Christ was crucified, the curtain in the Temple tore in two. Christ provided the way for His people to be reconciled to God. He is what all those sacrifices had pointed to for generations.

Psalm 24 foretold this moment:

"Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?
Who may stand in his holy place?
The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god."

The Psalm continues with reference to the ancient doors:

"Lift up your heads, you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The Lord strong and mighty,
the Lord mighty in battle...
He is the King of glory."

These are the ancient doors of Eden. Christ is the one who can open the way to the Tree of Life. The flaming sword guards the holiness of God and warns that whoever enters will die. The Lamb of God is slain and raised from the dead so that He can lead His people to the Tree of Life. The Book of Revelation ends with this same imagery of the Tree of Life. What is life? Jesus tells us in John 17:3, eternal life is knowing God and Christ Jesus whom He sent. We know by all of his works that reveal him to us. The pagan seeks a beatific vision by escaping the works of God.

The pagan story distorts all this imagery. This is part of their suppression of the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). For the pagan, death is merely a gateway to higher spiritual enlightenment. A person may have to die and reincarnate many times until they are pure enough to ascend the great chain of being. After this, the soul undergoes purgation—cleansing from impurities. This is the teaching of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and similar traditions—but it is not found in the Bible.

In the Bible, death is the final call. If a person does not heed that call to repent—represented by their physical death—they will have no other. That is their last opportunity. Pagan teaching downplays the seriousness of death. If a person did not heed the call of their own death they will not respond to any further call afterward.

Likewise, the Bible contains no doctrine of purgation after death. For those who place their trust in Christ, at the death of their body they are with Him. The body of sin is dead, and they are glorified. The work of sanctification is done in this life as they combat remaining sin. It does not continue after death.

The pagan uses similar imagery—purification, cleansing, regeneration, and the sacred—to tell a very different story. The Egyptian *Book of the Dead* was a map to prepare the dying for what came next. There, the soul is judged by its own works. The soul continues upward until it reaches the Empyrean, where the supreme deity resides, disconnected from the lower, impure levels of being. Matter is impure; the soul must leave it behind to reach the pagan beatific vision of union with the One. This is the material Dante relied up in his Divine Comedy for the structure of the afterlife (hell, purgatory, heaven) rather than the Bible.

For the pagan, one needs a guide—some wisdom teacher—to navigate this journey of deification. Jesus is interpreted as one among many such guides, perhaps the best and purest. The imagery of being washed, purified, regenerated, and enlightened is all part of this story. Plato's myth of Er, which is either a story of Zoroaster or influenced by Zoroastrianism, retells this journey through reincarnation.

You can see that these two stories represent two belief systems—and they are not compatible. The pagan story is a distortion of the biblical account, not the other way around. The simple are taken in by similar terminology. But the Christian is called to maturity, to grow in discernment and be able to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:14).

The pagan story is the inversion of the truth.

How to read the pagans

First, if you don't know the clarity of God's existence, you can't hold pagan thinkers accountable for their failure to see it. If you don't know what is clear about God and the moral law, you're in the same boat as the

pagans. A teacher who cannot show you it is clear God exists will not be able to give you instruction on the correct and full interpretation of art or philosophy.

Second, let the text speak for itself. Don't impose your framework on the text. Both Christians and pagans do this. The pagan reads his system into Scripture and makes it an allegory for the Lucifer story. The Christian looks for the gospel in the pagan system. They grasp at similar concepts and overlook their differing meanings. They say Gandalf or Harry Potter are Christ figures, when in fact they are better examples of the Lucifer hero. Yet even then, we can ask questions about what motivates these characters within the context of the story.

That a story contains good in conflict with evil does not make it Christian. That it contains a hero who suffers or even dies to help others does not make it Christian. But that doesn't mean we can't read it with benefit.

Instead, ask: what is the theme or question or struggle of this text? A story has a conflict and a resolution. A philosophical text poses a question and proposes an answer.

Reading and appreciating art is different from reading philosophy. With art, there is impression, beauty, and a good deal of personal taste. A person might simply like a given work of literature, and that's all there is to it. Ask them why, and they may have to search for reasons—because their appreciation wasn't the result of a cognitive process in the first place.

But art appreciation is still real, and we can all learn why some works are rightly called art, some are pop culture, and some are simply trash. Art works through symbolism and impressions in ways that bypass cognition and aim directly at intuition. You learn about the *objective correlative*—the natural sign for a reality. A fallen and dry maple leaf is a natural sign of death and decay. Art uses these signs, whereas philosophy uses propositions and arguments.

Here, I'm not going into detail about that kind of art interpretation. I'm picking up once the impressions, the personal preference, and the intuitive responses have all run their course, and we want to talk about meaning and interpretation.

In fiction, what is the conflict, and what motivations are operating? What is the desired resolution, and what actually happens? What aspects of human nature are revealed? How do the characters respond to suffering? What do they seek meaning in? What do they believe is good and evil? What is their highest goal?

Every human life reveals something about the glory of God. Some reveal the justice of God. Some reveal the mercy of God. Odysseus longs to be with his family—but what does "family" mean for him? Does he consider his unfaithfulness a problem? Is he upset at the thought of Penelope's unfaithfulness? These are central themes of *The Odyssey*: husband and wife, father and son, duty and loyalty. What does the text say about the purpose of marriage? About the purpose of a man and a woman, a husband and a wife, a father and a mother? Once we've given content to these, can we still relate to Odysseus?

The purpose of reading *The Odyssey* is not to prove it is historically inaccurate, or that the gods don't exist. The purpose is to examine the narrative and how it portrays human nature. Does the character gain or lose integrity as the story progresses? What does that tell us about being human? How does the character relate to the clear

general revelation within the story? What does he believe about suffering, about good and evil, and about what makes life meaningful?

We should not impose a rigid logical system onto fiction. That means we don't ask, "What did Odysseus think is eternal?" as if that were the foundational question. Instead, we interpret existentially: What did Odysseus care about? How well did he know himself? Why did he think tricking others would achieve his goals and bring lasting satisfaction? What did he think of the outcome? These kinds of questions help us tease out the meaning of a fictional work.

Reading a philosophical text is different. There, you are looking at the answer the author gives to a specific question. The answer might be completely right, completely wrong, or a mixture of both.

In philosophy, we do ask what larger system the philosopher is operating within. Even when a philosopher addresses a single question, that question is nested within a broader worldview.

Take Aristotle on logic. He studies the nature of inference: how can we guarantee the truth of a conclusion from its premises? He then studies the many kinds of propositions and their relationships. The fact that he also promoted a false view of God doesn't affect his claims about inference. Those claims stand or fall on their own merit.

But when we study Aristotle as a philosopher, his estimation is lowered because, although he studied logic, he didn't apply it to his beliefs about what is eternal and good. Why not? What does that tell us about him?

Authorial intent does not matter—neither for philosophy nor for fiction. The text is the text. If the text is inconsistent or incoherent, the author's intent won't resolve that. And knowing that the author had a fight with his wife before writing doesn't change the objectivity of the work. Attempting to divine the author's intent is like thinking there are secrets behind the text that you must uncover before reading it properly. It belongs more to the occult and esoteric reading than to serious analysis.

Conclusion

We started with a reading from the Book of Judges. The pattern of apostacy and judgment still applies today. As Christians lament their decline of influence in the West, they can point to many outward foes just like Israel did in Canaan. But God directed Israel to look at its compromise with pagan unbelief. Here I have presented you with the case that Christians have done the same thing in our day with the paganism around them. To make that case I defined paganism and contrasted it the Biblical teaching. I then showed the many ways it is saturated in culture around us from intellectuals who adopt the Aristotelian god, to literarily sources, and to pop-culture. As a matter of homework, you can look to see where the Lucifer hero shows up in the pop culture all around you.

Does this mean we should never read pagan authors or reflect on their works? No. All of God's works reveal His glory. Even sinners reveal the glory of God—though in different ways. But we must be clear on what is being revealed. God providentially allows unbelief to develop so that it can display its nature and its inherent consequences. It is our duty and delight to perceive what God is doing.

Understanding the pagan system will help you avoid serious errors—such as "finding the gospel in the *Iliad*." But more than that, it will help you read pagan texts in a deeper, more meaningful way. You will begin to see them as what they are: the works of image-bearers who have rebelled against God and yet are desperately seeking meaning. Their stories are a combination of truth drawn from God's world and error born from their own unbelief, self-deception, and self-justification.

Christian: learn to read clear general revelation while you are young. Doing so will build and protect your faith. It is time that Christians turn their lament of decline into a broken and contrite spirit of repentance for their unbelief that has limited how they understand both general and special revelation.

"And the people of Israel said to the Lord, "We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to you. Only please deliver us this day." So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord, and he became impatient over the misery of Israel" (Judges 10: 15-16).
