

# The Spiritual Realm and the Christian Story: The Apologetic Value of The Unseen Realm by Michael Heiser

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## Abstract

Michael Heiser's work in *The Unseen Realm* presents the deep mythos of the Bible and the spiritual saga it contains. As society continues to drift deeper into the consequences of Friedrich Nietzsche's godless universe, Heiser's unseen realm offers apologists an exciting and beautiful alternate narrative. Christianity is more interesting and compelling than other conceptions of the universe. The biblical worldview calls for humankind to be elevated within its glorification and service to God, and it identifies humanity's failure as cosmically significant in both Heaven and Earth. While many narratives, ancient and modern, call for the glorification of the human as the ultimate end, Scripture's spiritual orbit turns the story of life on its head as it culminates in the God-man on the cross. This story of grace provides a powerful response to Nietzsche's men-above-odds narrative now espoused in modern fantasy, sci-fi, and resurrected pagan mythology. Using Gavin Ortlund's apologetic of beauty in *Why God Makes Sense in a World That Doesn't*, this research will expound Heiser's unseen realm and contrast it with the worldview developed in Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals*. This apologetic will contrast pagan mythology and human primacy with the fantastical account of the spiritual realm found in Scripture. We also suggest further research examining how Heiser's work can interact with Jungian psychology to provide persuasive accounts of the Christian metanarrative, and ecclesiological work exploring how churches might invite congregants into practices that catechize them to the cosmic and spiritual nature of the Christian faith.

## Introduction

It is irrational to conceive that the visible world (also referred to as the physical world in which mankind resides in the present) does not exist. However, this world is not the only world that exists. Michael Heiser, an Old Testament scholar, demonstrated that another world exists through his treatment of Psalm 82 (*The Unseen Realm*, 15), where "gods were being condemned in their administration of the nations of the earth" (13), as well as other pivotal biblical texts. This world that Heiser is talking about is important for the wholeness of humans' understanding of the narrative of human life. Yet **the spiritual world is neglected or at least under-looked when forming a comprehensive worldview surrounding human life and its narrative.** This world is invisible. Heiser referred to this spiritual world as the unseen realm.

This project does *not* focus on proving the existence of the physical or the invisible world, nor is the goal to synthesize Heiser's work in *The Unseen Realm*. Rather, the goal of this project is to compare *The Unseen Realm* to elements found within the work of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (*Genealogy of Morals*), which accounts for the narrative of the visible and invisible worlds in examining the concepts of good vs evil, guilt, and meaning. The works of Nietzsche and Heiser in their investigation of existential questions have led them to **two radically different conclusions.** Using the apologetic framework of Gavin Ortlund, their conclusions on morality and purpose will be compared.

## Methods

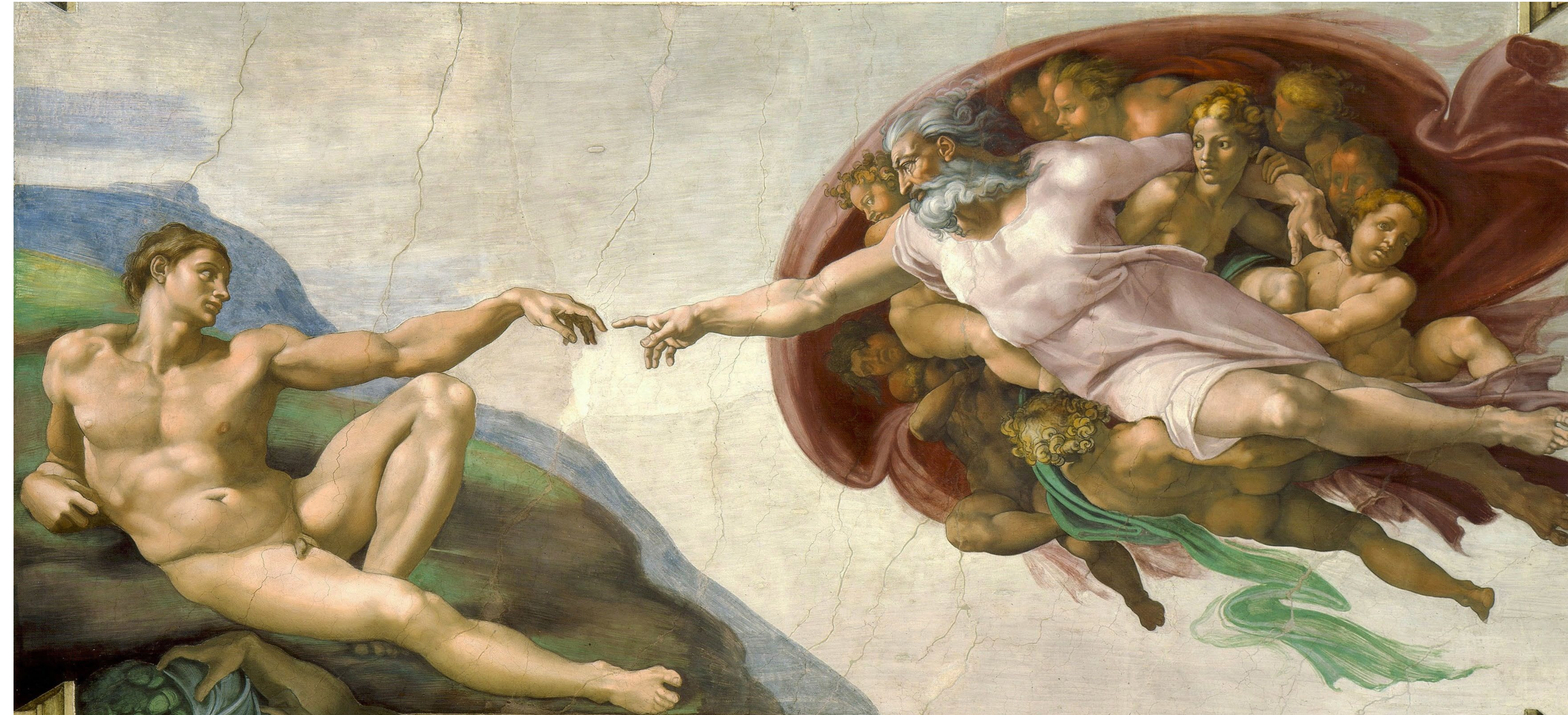
The methodology will be based on Gavin Ortlund's book *Why God Makes Sense in a World that Doesn't: The Beauty of Christian Theism*, which approaches arguments in a two-fold manner: on the one hand, arguments are placed "in a narrative frame," and, on the other hand, arguments are made abductively. The worldviews portrayed and offered both in *The Unseen Realm* by Michael Heiser and in *Genealogy of Morals* by Friedrich Nietzsche will be framed in **narrative terms.** Once the worldviews have been accurately and fairly framed in narrative form, then an abductive investigation will be made to **see which narrative best accounts for, and will most likely satisfy, humankind's deep longing for beauty.** The hypothesis is that Michael Heiser's *The Unseen Realm* demonstrates that the Christian metanarrative is a more beautiful story. **Therefore, it is more desirable to live according to Christian metanarrative.**

## References

Heiser, Michael S. *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019.

Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Douglas Smith. *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic: By Way of Clarification and Supplement to My Last Book, Beyond Good and Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Ortlund, Gavin. *Why God Makes Sense in a World That Doesn't: The Beauty of Christian Theism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021.



The Creation of Man – Circa 1511 by Michelangelo

"God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment."

Psalm 82:1 ESV

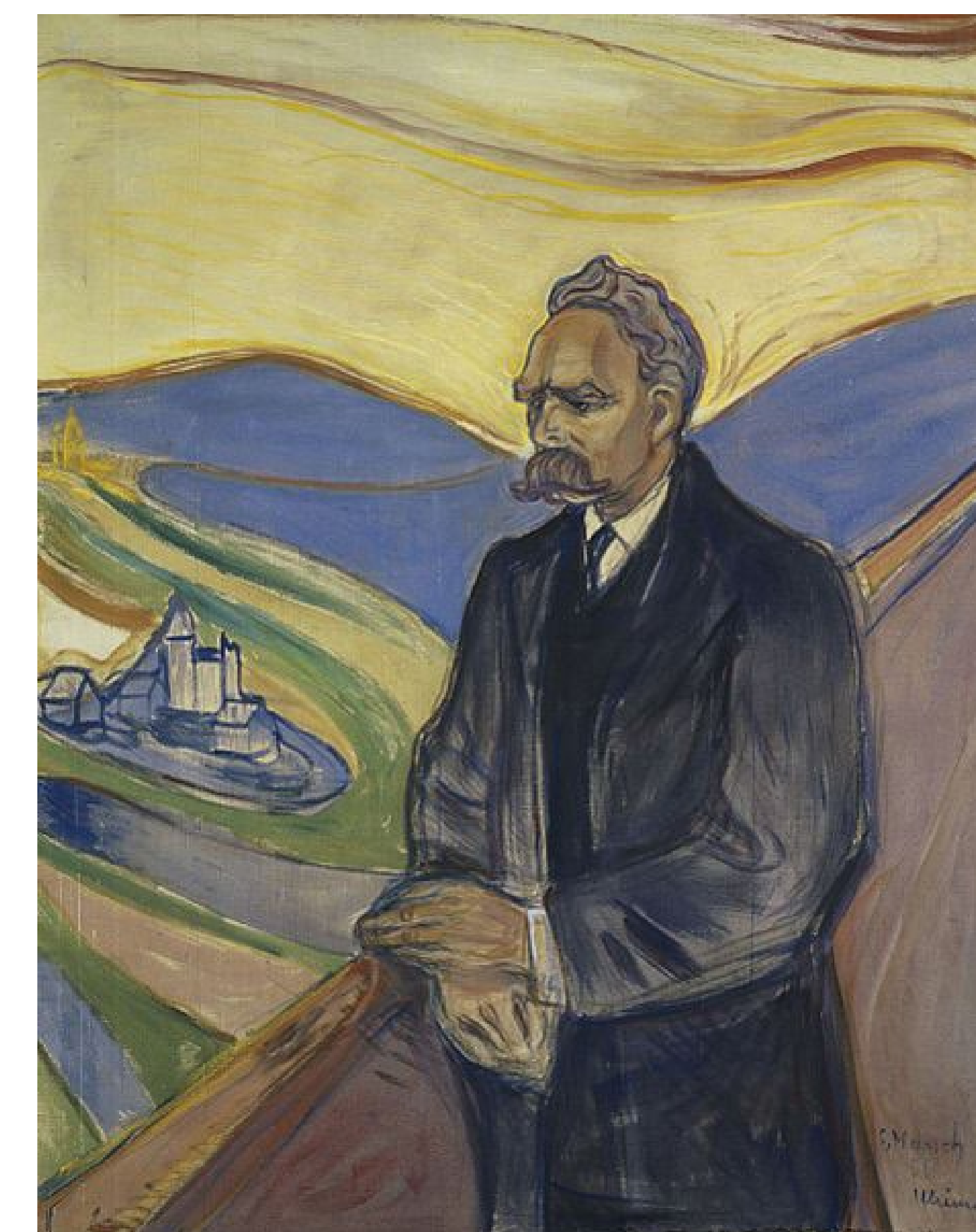


"Arthurum Regem Et Equites Mensae Rotundae" Circa 1470

"Narrative has a unique power to convince in our current context," because:

1. It appeals more naturally to the heart, will, and imagination.
2. It can be less confrontational and more inviting.
3. It is better able to furnish meaning and convey beauty.
4. It conveys truth more concretely.
5. It has greater ability to break through cynicism and apathy.
6. It has greater explanatory reach.
7. It is better positioned to address the problem of evil.

(*Why God makes Sense in a World that Doesn't*, 9-10)



Friedrich Nietzsche, 1844-1900  
Painting by Edvard Munch, 1906

## Results

### Analysis

In *The Unseen Realm*, Heiser argues that **mankind was created by YHWH to rule over the earth by bearing His image in creation and having communion with Him.** Humanity was to participate in YHWH's heavenly court from an exalted Eden. The nobility of humanity is not self-evident in that it was brought about by the innate qualities of Adam and Eve but is instead predicated on that **they were fashioned and commissioned by a noble God who desired not only their worship but their partnership with Him.** The rebellious fall of mankind is coupled with the fall of YHWH's heavenly council. A spiritual being deceived the royal couple into pursuing rulership on *their* terms. The rebellion of the nations is influenced by spiritual rulers. Thus, **the twisted nature of conquest and the atrocities of wickedness are committed by both humans and spirits who have rejected the righteous nobility and image-bearing rule of YHWH.** The cross in its humiliation at the hands of evil was how YHWH chose to rescue His people from wickedness. The crucifixion is described in terms of a heightened spiritual battle; thus, Jesus combatted the very forces that are implicated in the story of world wickedness, gaining victory over them by rising vindicated from the dead. **Through the cross, Jesus conquered the powers of darkness and provided the gift of the Spirit to His church so that they could walk in unity with YHWH.**

Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* includes a critique of Christianity's moral structure. Religion is viewed in an unenchanted light, describing its humility not as a virtue, but as quelling the noble inclination of man to rise to self-sufficiency. **Man's natural domination is accompanied by the monster of cruelty, which must be appreciated and tamed.** Christian morality, he argues, sprang from a *reaction* to cultures that sought to harness and funnel man's animalistic "wickedness" into conquest (26). He describes the morality of Judaism as "slave morality" (22), **a power play of an oppressed people against the dominant, with the humility of the crucifixion as the final draw to pull the world away from seeking noble human virtues.** Christianity does not subdue the oppressive monster of cruelty but repulses its system, which he calls *the old morality*, or domination by the nobler in society.

### Comparison

Nietzsche's view of the upside-down world of Christianity is a demoralizing argument. He argues that because Christianity loathes the dominating aspect of nobility, it has thrown away all forms of nobility, replacing them with the dehumanization of death on a cross. **Nietzsche ultimately, then, argued for a resurrection of the ancient idea of nobility through domination by the dissolution of Christian morality.** With this comes a rejection of all of the virtues that fall under humility and piety, including many aspects of morality one would consider beautiful.

To Heiser, the nobility of humanity is not in its natural state when it is cruel and domineering, but instead when it accurately images God to the world. The many instances of cruelty in the world are a symptom that humanity has become infected by a fatal illness, one brought about by its collusion with spiritual forces intent on disrupting God's good creation. A partnership with God is only possible by rejecting this rebellion. **Jesus' death, resurrection, and Spirit gave His followers the ability to stand up to ancient wickedness and regain the nobility of Eden.**

Heiser's diagnosis of the cruelty of humanity retains the beautiful aspects of the Christian worldview while refuting Nietzsche's argument that cruelty is a permanent aspect of the human condition. According to Ortlund's methodology, an important factor of an argument is its beauty, as it makes the conclusion more desirable. Nietzsche admits that the biblical worldview is alluring and structures his argument to rebuff it. **Heiser's argument captures the beautiful aspect of YHWH's relationship with humanity and shows the Christian narrative to be more desirable.**

## Future Work

1. Continue to compare the works of Heiser and Nietzsche by using more of Nietzsche's works, such as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.
2. Analyze how Jungian psychology understands human decision-making as it relates to Ortlund's apologetic of narrative and beauty.
3. Compare the biblical narrative as presented by Heiser with the narratives of other prominent secular thinkers such as:
  1. The psychological work of Sigmund Freud.
  2. The existentialist work of Jean-Paul Sartre.
  3. The philosophical work of Albert Camus.
  4. The scientific work of Richard Dawkins.
4. Examine how ecclesial practices have a practical effect in inviting churchgoers into the cosmic narrative of Christianity.