

This Injustice Will Not Stand

Reframing Divine Rebellion through Justice and Failed Governance in Psalm 82

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In his quest to recover the supernatural worldview of the ancient audience, Michael Heiser helped a generation of readers take the *elohim* of Psalm 82 seriously as divine beings.¹ This recovery of the biblical worldview had as much to do with the methodology that Dr. Heiser used as it did the content of the worldview itself. Both methodology as well as the detail that methodology uncovers were crucial to Heiser's project.² In this paper, I utilize frame semantics—a method that attends to the roles, relationships, expectations, and outcomes evoked by a text—to ask us to take the psalm's own description of the gods' offense as seriously as we take the question of who those gods are.

Heiser's articulation of what he named the Deuteronomy 32 worldview involves a divine rebellion framework shaped by Genesis 3, 6, and 11. The scattering of the nations, with those people becoming estranged from Yahweh and placed under spiritual beings who become their gods, forms the backdrop of Psalm 82. This idea that the allotted *elohim* "become" gods is an important aspect of Heiser's description of the situation, as he believed that the divine beings placed over the nations were initially loyal, later became corrupt, and wrongfully received the worship of the nations.³ While a plausible construction, there are parts that are not stated directly, even within Psalm 82. But on account of the way that Heiser connected these ideas, the psalm that describes the judgment of the gods has become connected to a story of rebellion, allegiance, and worship. This paper will not defend or argue against that idea, which is built through a wider net of canonical texts. What it does ask is what conceptual scene Psalm 82 itself most clearly evokes, and secondarily, where the local frame might allow for worship within that scene. Frame semantics will provide the means of testing that question.

Frame semantics, developed initially by Charles Fillmore, is a means to understand how humans construct meaning in their cognitive and linguistic imaginations. In frame semantics,

¹ Michael S. Heiser, "Should אֱלֹהִים (*ĒLŌHĪM*) with Plural Predication Be Translated 'Gods'?", *The Bible Translator* 61, no. 3 (2010): 135–36, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026009351006100302>.

² Michael S. Heiser, *The Bible Unfiltered: Approaching Scripture on Its Own Terms* (Lexham Press, 2017), 16–17, 19.

³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Lexham Press, n.d.), 110–16; Heiser, *The Bible Unfiltered*, 214–17.

words do not come pre-loaded with dictionary definitions, but their meaning is encoded within complex conceptual structures called frames. These frames are made up of many elements and relationships. In this paper, I use the technical term “frame elements” for the components through which that conceptual scene becomes visible.⁴ For the purposes of this study, I examine such features as participants, the roles they occupy, their relationships, expectations, actions, settings, and outcomes. Two of these that I will focus on are the participants and their roles. A participant is the particular actor or group that is present within the frame; a role is the function that participant occupies. God and the *elohim*, for example, are participants in Psalm 82, while “judge,” “judged party,” or “vulnerable party” describe roles that participants fill.

Leveraged for biblical exegesis,⁵ frame semantics isn’t simply a more elaborate form of word study. Individual words evoke frames, but they do not contain them in full. When faced with a word or phrase, the interpreter asks how the passage as well as the background fills out the scene. Every element of a frame will not be lexically explicit, since frames necessarily evoke knowledge and expectations beyond what is stated.⁶ Such elements may arise either from cultural or canonical context, presuming that the text can legitimately hold said canonical context. The reason we can use intertextuality to shed light on a passage is because the Bible is more than a collection of individual authors. Thus, Genesis can be reasonably read in light of the entire Pentateuch because the received audience would have read it as a complete structure. Frame semantics provides caution against bringing in, for instance, anachronistic context from the prophetic books or the New Testament into the frames of Genesis. Certainly, the entire witness of Scripture is to be used to understand the revelation of God, but since we do not have a text that dropped from heaven in an instant, it is necessary to take first the local frame of earlier texts before we supply the wider one of the whole. We must also guard against assumptions that the modern interpreter brings to the text. This accords well with the methodology of Dr. Heiser himself.⁷

To clarify terms, I will refer to the frame evoked within a particular passage as its *local frame*. I use *canonical frame* for the various frames in different passages throughout the canon, and *theological frame* for the further synthesis of those frames into theological categories. These are working distinctions rather than formally established categories within frame semantics; more precise definitions and criteria for movement between them remain to be developed.

⁴ Charles Fillmore, “Frame Semantics,” in *Linguistics in the Morning Calm: Selected Papers from SICOL-1981*, ed. Linguistic Society of Korea; Hanshin Publishing Company, 1982, 111–12, <http://brenocon.com/Fillmore>; Collin F. Baker et al., “The Berkeley FrameNet Project,” *36th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics and 17th International Conference on Computational Linguistics, Volume 1*, August 1998, 86–87, <https://doi.org/10.3115/980845.980860>.

⁵ Approaches utilizing frame semantics have increasingly been applied to biblical Hebrew, where it offers a means of attending to lexical meaning as well as context presupposed by the text. Stephen Shead, for example, applies a frame-based approach to נָקַח and related lexemes for exploring, searching, and seeking, while Carsten Ziegert reconstructs a frame for יָדָע from the participants, relationships, circumstances, and expectations associated with its occurrences.

⁶ Carsten Ziegert, “What Is יָדָע? A Frame-Semantic Approach,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44, no. 4 (2020): 717–18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089219862806>; Stephen Shead, *Radical Frame Semantics and Biblical Hebrew: Exploring Lexical Semantics* (Brill, 2011), 153–55, <https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/isbn/9789004222182/html?lang=en>.

⁷ Heiser, *The Bible Unfiltered*, 16–19.

The first task of identifying the local frame may not be a simple one, as it may be implicit. A passage does not have to announce, for example, that this is a “courtroom scene” in order to evoke one. If it provides elements such as a judge, parties appearing before that judge, accusations, evidence, a verdict, or a penalty, those elements together allow us to recognize the larger conceptual situation. The meaning of each individual part is clarified by its relationship to the others, and it is the accumulation of those relationships that allows the larger frame to emerge. A lexical item considered apart from those relationships is, in an important sense, out of its element. It is essential, as well, to place these elements within the specific cultural background of the frame. A courtroom in the ancient Near East is not precisely the same as a courtroom in middle America, and so we cannot import all the same ideas.

This also means that frames cannot be identified simply by tracking the recurrence of specific words. Two passages can have the same frame even when they use different vocabulary so long as they have a similar frame structure. That structure is not wedded to particular agents who act as the participants in the frame, but is controlled more by roles and their relationships. For example, within a judicial frame, the role of judge might be occupied by a human magistrate, a king, a divine being, or God himself. Another reason we cannot just track specific words is because a word may participate in different frames. To “judge” can mean to decide a legal dispute in a courtroom. It can also describe the broader work of ruling or governing a people, as seen in Israel’s judges. Frames such as these may overlap, but they should not be collapsed into one another when they differ enough in their roles, expectations, actions, or outcomes. Frames are defined not by single words, but by the frame elements that come together to create them. Laying out the elements in each passage allows us to both identify and compare frames.

I argue that Psalm 82 frames the offense of the gods most immediately as a failure of judicial governance. Their rebellion, insofar as that larger category is appropriate, consists here in the corruption and neglect of their subordinate judicial responsibility in governing nations. The effects of that failure extend beyond individual injustice to the destabilization of the ordered world itself, and the psalm concludes with an appeal for God to arise and judge the earth. Read in this way, Psalm 82 does not strictly tell us that divine rulers have rebelled against the Most High. It gives us the content of their failed rule and why God is judging them.

The Local Frame of Psalm 82

Participants, Roles, and Accountability in Verse 1

Psalm 82 opens within a council scene, but not one that is simply involved with deliberating the minutes of the court. God stands in the divine assembly and, in the midst of the gods, he judges a very complicated case, indeed. The opening verse supplies several frame elements at once along with their relationships. We have a setting, which is the divine assembly; the initial participants, God and the gods; and the action of judgment which moves from the head of the council towards its members. In this scene, God is not merely present as head of the council on a typical day of council deliberation; he occupies the role of judge, while the other divine beings are those whose conduct is under judgment. More than a glimpse behind the curtain of divine

administration, the psalm opens with accountability inside that administration. This provides some warrant for the idea of rebellion, but the frame itself is not focused on the gods' rebellion against the Most High, but on their conduct towards those they have some authority over.

Taking the *elohim* as genuine divine beings⁸ matters for identifying the particular occupants of the scene, but their specific identity does not tell us anything about the role they occupy in the psalm, nor does it tell us the frame at large. God is a participant who fills the role of judge. The *elohim* are participants who initially fill the role of the judged. The charge that follows will demonstrate that these same participants also exercise the role of judge in relation to others. The frame continues with this nested hierarchy where those who judge are themselves answerable to a judge above them. The supernatural identity of the *elohim* does not compete with this judicial reading. While humans are certainly held to the same standards of judicial accountability, the role of "judge" is not an ontological one. As we shall see, one of the things that makes Psalm 82 stand out from other passages with similar frames is the scope and consequence of the authority these particular judges exercise, an authority whose failure will eventually be connected with cosmic disturbance.

Expected Judgment and Its Violation in Verses 2–4

The first words addressed to the gods begin to specify the issue. "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?" (v. 2).⁹ The verb "judge" alone cannot settle the frame, since the concept of judging can belong to individual legal disputes or to the task of governing. The surrounding elements must tell us what sort of judging the psalm has in view, including its scope. The word "judge" gives us the role of the *elohim*, and though implied rather than stated outright, correct judgment is an attached expectation. The expected judgment is outlined by its particular violation. And here we have a new set of participants, the wicked who enter the scene as the beneficiaries of the corruption. Even the phrase "how long?" contributes to the frame. The charge concerns a sustained failure, which suggests an ongoing responsibility for the administration of justice and the question itself signals that this injustice will not be allowed to stand indefinitely.

The accusation that the gods "show partiality to the wicked" is a Hebrew expression that literally speaks of "lifting the face," an idiom that can describe favorable acceptance and has selective force in judicial settings in the Pentateuch. Leviticus 19:15 forbids doing injustice, which is specified as lifting the face of the poor or favoring the great in judgment.¹⁰ In Psalm 82's frame, then, the inclusion of the wicked is highlighting more than just their moral status. They occupy the more complicated role of a favored party whose status in relation to the rulers has distorted

⁸ Heiser, "Should אֱלֹהִים (*ĒLŌHĪM*) with Plural Predication Be Translated 'Gods'?", 135–36; Daniel McClellan, "The Gods-Complaint: Psalm 82 as a Psalm of Complaint," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137 (January 2018): 835–36, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1374.2018.452196>; E. Theodore Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Brill, 1980), 228–29.

⁹ Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

¹⁰ Douglas Mangum, "The Biblical Hebrew Idiom 'Lift the Face' in the Septuagint of Job," *HTS Theologese Studies / Theological Studies* 74, no. 3 (2018): 1, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i3.5025>; Mayer I. Gruber, *The Many Faces of Hebrew* אֲשַׁר סִינָה *lift up the face*, *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 95, no. 2 (1983): 252–60, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zatw.1983.95.2.252>.

the exercise of justice. As the following verse proves, this does not remove the impact of their wickedness, but in verse 2, their role indicates that impartiality belongs to the expected judging role, and partiality identifies one way that role has been violated.

Verses 3–4 add even more participants and, with them, a fuller description of what right judgment requires. “Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” Verse 2 describes justice via its violation, and verses 3–4 provide the imperatives of the positive expected actions of the role of judge. The same judicial verb used in the accusation is repeated in the command to judge the weak and fatherless. The parallel command that is translated in the ESV as “maintain the right” further specifies that these judges are to vindicate the afflicted and destitute by recognizing and upholding their just cause.¹¹ This gives the frame an expected outcome for the judged as well as an expected action by the judge.

The terms weak, fatherless, afflicted, destitute, and needy likely point to different forms of social vulnerability, even where the precise boundaries between the groups are difficult to recover. As participants in this scene, however, together they share a functional relationship to the judging role, as they are people whose weakness, poverty, affliction, or lack of protection leaves them especially dependent upon the proper exercise of justice. Some are endangered by the wicked (thus documenting why the wicked are wicked), while others are vulnerable without any personal oppressor being named. The accumulation of terms fills the frame with multiple instances of different kinds of parties toward whom these gods have failed in their responsibility.

The literary correspondence between verse 2 and verses 3–4 really ties the frame together and further elaborates the relationships among these elements as well as the definition of justice that is given both in negative as well as positive ways. “You judge unjustly” is answered by the command to judge the weak and fatherless rightly; showing partiality to the wicked is answered finally by the command to deliver the needy “from the hand of the wicked.” The wicked who appear first as improper beneficiaries of judgment worsen the situation by being part of the reason justice needs to occur in the first place. The movement of verse 4 into “rescue” and “deliver” continues to test the boundaries of the frame as we may have understood it to this point, because at least within our modern framework, these are not commonly used words for a judge.

The psalm says remarkably little about punishing the wicked, even though punishment might ordinarily be expected within a judicial frame. Certainly, the power of the wicked must be broken if the vulnerable are to be delivered from their hand, and the Bible does not shy away from retributive action as verse 7 will demonstrate. However, the imperatives of verses 3–4 primarily foreground what proper judgment must accomplish for those who have been wronged. The movement from vindication into rescue and deliverance shows that justice is to act to change the condition of those under threat. This focuses justice on a projected positive outcome toward the injured party rather than a merely punitive or retributive one oriented towards the offender,

¹¹ Marvin Tate et al., *Psalms 51-100, Volume 20*, ed. David Allen Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Zondervan Academic, 2015), 330; Francis Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Hendrickson Academic, 2010), 842.

and it may be one of the aspects of the psalm that indicates that our common frame of justice today may not have the same center of gravity as that of the Bible's.

Consequences of Failed Judgment in Verse 5

Having spelled out what the gods should have been doing in relation to those under them, the psalm turns in verse 5 to ignorance, darkness, and instability. "They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken." Unlike the accusations and imperatives of the previous section, this verse is descriptive rather than another clear statement of violation or obligation. Unfortunately, the description is not entirely clear, primarily because the identity of the "they" is not certain, though the referent must be one of the participants already present in the text. The vague ignorance and darkness do not assist in determining what's happening, though the most immediate possibility is that "they" are the gods addressed in verses 2–4.¹² In that reading, their lack of knowledge and understanding is part of their characterization as failed judges.

There is, however, another possibility. Because the subject is left unstated, some identify the "they" with the people affected by the gods' failure.¹³ In that case, ignorance and darkness describe the consequences of what the gods have produced for others. Heiser adopts this reading and makes it an important step in his interpretation of what is happening in the psalm. When his wider canonical framework is brought into view, new information comes to light. After citing verse 5, he remarks, "But injustice wasn't the only crime of the gods,"¹⁴ and proceeds to identify their acceptance of the nations' worship as an additional offense. His identification of the pronoun with the nations thus allows verse 5 to function for him as a bridge from the injustice explicitly described in Psalm 82 to the worship and allegiance concerns supplied by his Deuteronomy 32 framework.

From a transparent methodological standpoint, however, it is important to distinguish between two kinds of interpretive moves that I have been working to keep clear, which are determining what a local frame includes and what other passages might provide to illuminate that local frame. As stated previously, worship and allegiance enter Heiser's reading at this point through the canonical framework he has articulated. He brings in the New Testament to state that, "[t]he nations were supposed to 'seek God' (Acts 17:27), something of course they rarely did, instead worshipping the *elohim* assigned to them (who apparently in turn did not rule the nations according to Yahweh's justice [Psa 82:2-4])." Then, in direct reference to Psalm 82:5, he states "that the gods who received the worship of the peoples in the nations did wrong by doing so — thereby

¹² Brent A. Strawn, "The Poetics of Psalm 82: Three Critical Notes along with a Plea for the Poetic," *Revue Biblique* 121, no. 1 (2014): 21–46, <https://doi.org/10.2143/RBI.121.1.3157161>; McClellan, "The Gods-Complaint," 844 fn 42.

¹³ Strawn, "The Poetics of Psalm 82," 21–46. McClellan, "The Gods-Complaint," 844, likewise takes the "they" of v. 5 as the peoples of the nations, but interprets their ignorance and darkness as consequences of the gods' unjust judgment and neglect rather than as evidence of an additional offense involving worship. This is significant because agreement on the referent does not itself determine the frame through which the language of v. 5 should be understood.

¹⁴ Michael S. Heiser, "Ch15," *MORE UNSEEN REALM*, n.d., accessed October 6, 2026, <https://www.moreunseenrealm.com/ch15/>.

causing the spiritual darkness or keeping the nations ignorant of Yahweh.”¹⁵ This paper will not answer the question of whether the context of worship exists within Psalm 82 in some form, but I do suggest that the way to approach it is through extended application of frame semantics through relevant passages.¹⁶

The ambiguity of the pronoun of verse 5 affects where the ignorance and darkness are located, and either identification of its referent should remain open. If the gods are the subject, these further characterize the failed judges; if their subjects are the referent, they describe what failed rule has produced. Either alternative remains connected to the judicial failure. Heiser’s reading, by contrast, illustrates how a canonical frame may suggest more information without requiring that conclusion from the local frame.

Whatever the referent of “they,” the consequences now become, quite literally, earth-shaking at the end of the verse. Whether the language of the foundations of the earth is understood physically, socially, or in terms that do not sharply separate the two, the consequence hits beyond individual parties or even groups of people. What began with distorted judgment and neglected rescue now expands to the condition of the ordered world.¹⁷ Though expansive, the scope of the consequences does not necessarily affect the frame itself. A frame can be narrow or wide in effect without changing, and the identity of the *elohim* is sufficient to explain cosmic upheaval, though not necessarily within a simple judicial frame.

Judgment, Removal, and Inheritance in Verses 6–8

We return to the judges with the verdict in verses 6–7. “I said, ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.’” Once again, the distinction between participant identity and frame role remains important. Indeed, the force of the sentence, “like men you shall die,” actually depends upon a contrast between their current status and their fate. We don’t have an explanation of the metaphysics of divine death, and such explanation is unnecessary for the frame to be clear.

The reference to falling “like a prince” introduces ruler language at the point of punishment. The nested hierarchy established earlier culminates in sanction. But even here, retribution is not the end focus. The vulnerable still need rescue and deliverance. The foundations of the earth cannot be left to quake. And here, at the end, we are left with a hope, not yet a complete resolution, but a petition. “Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations.” The

¹⁵ Heiser, “Ch15.”

¹⁶ Possible passages for further frame-semantic comparison include Isa 44:18–20; 45:20; Ps 115:4–8; Jer 10:14–15; and Deut 32:17, along with later canonical texts such as Rom 1:21–25; Eph 4:17–18; and Gal 4:8. Isaiah 44:18 is especially noteworthy because it uses the same Hebrew sequence found in Ps 82:5, לֹא יָדְעוּ וְלֹא בִינּוּ (“they do not know and they do not understand”), within an explicitly idolatrous context. Any such comparison would need to pay attention to the Hebrew expressions and the frames evoked in each passage rather than assuming equivalence from similar English vocabulary.

¹⁷ Patrick D. Miller, “Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament: The Divine Council as Cosmic-Political Symbol,” in *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 267 (Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 438–39, <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/israelite-religion-and-biblical-theology-9781841271422/>.

request for God to judge the earth is grounded in the declaration that he will inherit all the nations, here finally mentioned directly. The combination of the terminology of “nations” and “inheritance” evokes the conceptual territory of Deuteronomy 32:8–9, where the nations are apportioned and Israel is Yahweh’s inheritance. Though we should not force the entire frame of Deuteronomy 32 into Psalm 82, we now have explicit language that moves the frame unmistakably into nations, possession, and rule.¹⁸ These elements provide the full warrant for Psalm 82’s adjudicatory frame to reside within the frame of governance. The select comparative passages that follow help clarify this.

Comparing the Frame of Psalm 82

The Narrower Frame of Adjudication

Given the constraints of the present study, the passages considered here are selective and brief, chosen to clarify the dual judicial and governance frames most relevant to Psalm 82. I will not draw out each passage’s frame elements in depth beyond providing enough definition for comparison. These examples will suffice for the purposes of the paper, though additional biblical and extra-biblical material could extend the analysis.

Leviticus 19:15 provides the closest judicial parallel to Psalm 82:2. The shared idiom of “lifting the face” makes the correspondence especially visible, but the frame comparison continues further than the shared idiomatic language. Both passages place a judge in relation to socially differentiated parties and make impartiality toward those parties an expectation of the judging role. In both, the status of a party must not determine the judgment. Leviticus 19 states that neither poor nor great shall receive deferential treatment, and Psalm 82 highlights not just great people, but wicked ones, which makes the offense even worse. Leviticus 19 highlights injustice, while Psalm 82 highlights injustice and a need to vindicate, rescue, and even shore up the foundations of the earth.

Deuteronomy 25:1 presents another aspect of the familiar judicial scene. Judges face disputing parties and are to vindicate the one in the right and condemn the wicked. Deuteronomy 25 remains narrowly focused on deciding the dispute, whereas Psalm 82 moves beyond that into rescue and deliverance. Comparing these texts in high detail can only go so far since Psalm 82 has much more to work with; however, this does help to identify the narrower frame. When pared down to basics, Deuteronomy 25 and its surroundings tell us what expectations we should find alongside individual judgments.

Second Chronicles 19:5–7 contains yet another relationship that is visible in Psalm 82, accountability above the judge. Jehoshaphat appoints judges who judge for Yahweh, with whom there is no injustice or partiality. The frame of this passage includes a superior who appoints

¹⁸ David Burnett, “‘So Shall Your Seed Be’: Paul’s Use of Genesis 15:5 in Romans 4:18 in Light of Early Jewish Deification Traditions,” *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 5 (October 2015): 223–24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jstudpaullett.5.2.0211>.

(Jehoshaphat), judges who are subordinate to Yahweh, an entrusted task, a standard derived from Yahweh's justice, and accountability for its exercise. Direct appointment is explicit in 2 Chronicles but not in Psalm 82, so that element should not be transferred between the passages, but the similar frame elements in both passages strongly license the comparative frames.

Taken together, these passages clarify the adjudicatory frame established locally in Psalm 82. They account well for impartial judgment, vindication, and accountability. They account less fully for the extreme consequences and ruler-related elements that emerge as the psalm develops. Those features require a different set of comparative texts.

The Broader Frame of Royal Governance

Psalm 72 supplies an unequivocal royal frame, and because of that, it helps to confirm what a governance frame entails. Its participants include a king, the people he judges, the poor and needy, and the oppressor. The king's role carries expected actions of judging with righteousness, defending and delivering the vulnerable, and crushing the oppressor; the expected outcomes extend to peace, flourishing, and the condition of the realm. Adjudication is present, and it functions in an ongoing ruler-subject relationship whose consequences extend beyond the decision of an individual case. With these elements described, the correspondence with Psalm 82 is therefore structural rather than merely lexical. Although the participants differ (humans in the one case and divine beings in the other), they occupy comparable positions in the same basic relational pattern of rule, vulnerability, threat, and protection. These correspondences provide a similar frame. Psalm 82 can thus be read in parallel with Psalm 72 without collapsing the distinct participants or settings of the two psalms.

Isaiah 11 gives a second royal example, this time through its portrait of the Davidic, messianic ruler. This passage provides an instructive contrast with Psalm 82. Isaiah's ruler possesses knowledge and understanding where Psalm 82:5 presents ignorance and darkness; he judges without distortion where Psalm 82's judges show partiality; and his rule tends toward order where theirs culminates in shaken foundations. For frame correspondence, we do not need direct lexical connections for each of these in parallel, just the same framework of elements and relationships within those elements. As with Psalm 72, the participants and setting differ, but the relationships overlap strongly.

The comparison may also lend some weight to identifying the "they" of Psalm 82:5 with the gods themselves. In Isaiah 11, knowledge and understanding belong to the ruler who judges rightly, making Psalm 82's declaration that "they neither know nor understand" a natural characterization of judges who have failed in precisely that responsibility. This does not resolve the grammatical ambiguity of Psalm 82:5, though it does provide evidence to strengthen the coherence of reading a governance frame.

Adjudication within Governance

The phrase “judicial governance” can now be used more precisely. Psalm 82 begins with a recognizable judicial frame but contains so much more than that frame explains. Psalm 72 and Isaiah 11 show those kinds of relationships and outcomes functioning within royal governance. In each of those texts, adjudication is one responsibility. It might be tempting to frame Psalm 82 entirely inside a governance frame similar to Psalm 72, but there are elements which must be accounted for, such as the judging of the gods themselves as well as their charge of injustice. We need both judgment as well as ruling in view for the entire frame.

With both the local and comparative frames in view, we can now return briefly to the larger theological category. In Heiser’s divine council framework, the gods’ failure is described as rebellion against the Most High, and specifically, that rebellion is frequently seen as taking worship.¹⁹ This paper’s argument does not rest on accepting or rejecting any of that framework. If rebellion is a larger category, Psalm 82 portrays it as injustice, not simply aggression against the Most High; it gives that rebellion concrete content in the gods’ unjust rule. That may be uncomfortable for those who would prefer for the prime judgment against gods to be one associated with their taking worship. We need not discount that idea as a whole, but what we should not do is claim that Psalm 82 clearly establishes the taking of worship as the gods’ judged offense.

Conclusion

The value of frame semantics for this study has been to help distinguish the elements and frame in the specific text itself from those introduced through broader canonical and theological relationships, frames which should be recognized as interpretive movements rather than be allowed to determine the local frame in advance. In Psalm 82, that distinction has allowed the language of divine rebellion to be reconsidered through the actual roles, expectations, relationships, and outcomes that the psalm directly supplies.

There is considerably more work to be done with Psalm 82 along these lines. The governance frame developed here could be tested against a range of biblical and ancient Near Eastern conceptions of divine and royal responsibility. The possibility of a worship frame deserves similar treatment through comparison with passages in which ignorance, darkness, idolatry, and knowledge occur together. Such work may strengthen, qualify, or complicate the canonical connections already proposed for Psalm 82, but those conclusions should emerge from the comparison.

More generally, frame semantic work in biblical theology would benefit from explicit use criteria. Standardization for evaluating frame elements would provide means for collaborative analysis. Creating technical definitions for local, canonical, and theological frames would assist in discovering when a locally evoked frame has been expanded, transformed, or incorporated into a larger canonical or theological one, and what controls should govern those interpretive movements. The application of frame semantics with biblical exegesis might also assist in developing guardrails for introducing background information into texts without inundating the

¹⁹ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 113–23.

frame with information. This is not a hermeneutical free-for-all. This is biblical theology. There are rules. These areas matter precisely because biblical theology necessarily brings texts and background into relationship with one another; the task is to make that methodologically visible.

For readers shaped by Heiser's recovery of the supernatural worldview, a frame semantics-informed approach extends an important part of his own methodological impulse of taking the text seriously enough to ask not only who its participants are, but what the text says about itself and its ancient world. Frame semantics is an especially useful tool for this project because it requires us to attune to the individual text in as particular a way as possible, without bringing in context that is anachronistic or otherwise inappropriate to what the individual biblical author is communicating. As Dr. Heiser said, we can "let the Bible be what it is."²⁰ But that means we've got our work cut out for us.

²⁰ Heiser, *The Bible Unfiltered*, 19.

- Baker, Collin F., Charles J. Fillmore, and John B. Lowe. "The Berkeley FrameNet Project." *36th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics and 17th International Conference on Computational Linguistics, Volume 1*, August 1998, 86–90. <https://doi.org/10.3115/980845.980860>.
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