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THE MEANING OF ’EMUNAH IN HABAKKUK 2:4: A HEBREW LANGUAGE ANALYSIS AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR THE LIFE OF FAITH

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ABSTRACT

The Hebrew term אֱמוּנָה (’emunah) in Habakkuk 2:4 carries substantial doctrinal weight in Pauline soteriology, Qumranic self-understanding, and Reformation theology, yet its semantic range—spanning fidelity, steadfastness, reliability, and trust—resists the stability that centuries of doctrinal use have imposed. The pronominal suffix in the Masoretic Text leaves unresolved whether the quality belongs to God, to the righteous person, or to the covenantal bond itself. Existing scholarship clusters around lexicographic, reception-historical, and theological approaches that rarely integrate lexical, syntactic, literary, and reception dimensions within a single analytical structure. This qualitative biblical exegesis integrates morphological, syntactic-contextual, semantic field, and reception-historical analysis of the Masoretic Text, Septuagint, Pesher Habakkuk, and selected Targumic and patristic witnesses, organized through a documented coding scheme yielding four thematic clusters: fidelity as divine attribute, trust as human response, eschatological endurance, and covenantal relationality. The study constructs the Covenantal Faithfulness-Trust Matrix, a new exegetical instrument mapping ’emunah across the source of fidelity and the temporal orientation of trust, applicable to other occurrences and prophetic texts. It contributes a transferable coding scheme for semantic-theological analysis of contested lexical items and demonstrates that the verse's theological weight resides in its constitutive semantic tension, which translations collapsing that tension risk distorting.

Keywords: ’emunah; Habakkuk 2:4; lexical semantics; covenantal faithfulness; biblical reception

INTRODUCTION

Few verses in the Hebrew Bible carry as much doctrinal freight as Habakkuk 2:4. The line rendered in most English translations as "the righteous shall live by his faith" became a load-bearing text for Pauline soteriology, for the Qumran community's self-understanding, and for the Reformation principle of sola fide. Yet the Hebrew term at the center of the verse, אֱמוּנָה (’emunah), resists the semantic stability that two millennia of doctrinal use have imposed upon it. Its lexical range extends across fidelity, steadfastness, reliability, and trust, and the pronominal suffix attached to it in the Masoretic Text raises a question that translation alone cannot settle: does the quality belong to God, to the righteous person, or to the covenantal bond that holds both together? The interpretive stakes are not confined to philology. How one resolves the term determines whether the verse teaches

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divine reliability as the ground of survival, human trust as the condition of life, or a reciprocal dynamic in which neither dimension can be isolated from the other.

The urgency of returning to this question is reinforced by three converging developments. First, recent scholarship on the Book of the Twelve has increasingly treated Habakkuk as a coherent theological composition rather than a loose collection of oracles, which means that the semantic precision of its central affirmation shapes how the book's theodicy argument is read as a whole (Amar, 2025). Second, translation practice continues to divide along confessional lines, with some traditions preferring "faith" and others "faithfulness," a division with measurable consequences for preaching, catechesis, and pastoral care. Third, contemporary reflection on faith formation in contexts of suffering and apparent divine silence returns repeatedly to Habakkuk, yet often without sustained attention to the philological foundations of the text. The result is a body of practical theology that draws on the verse while remaining uncertain about what its key term actually means.

Existing scholarship on Habakkuk 2:4 clusters around three approaches. The lexicographic strand traces ’emunah through its cognates and occurrences across the Hebrew Bible, often concluding that the term denotes steadfastness or reliability rather than belief (Tali, 2022). The reception-historical strand examines how the verse was appropriated in Pauline, Qumranic, and Reformation contexts, frequently disagreeing about whether Paul's reading represents a legitimate extension of the Hebrew text or a creative reinterpretation that departs from its original sense. The theological strand treats the verse as a proof text for doctrines of justification or providence, sometimes at the cost of the linguistic detail that would complicate those doctrines. What remains underdeveloped is an integrated analysis that holds the lexical, syntactic, literary, and reception dimensions together while explicitly modeling the relationship between divine fidelity and human trust as a single conceptual structure. Studies typically privilege one dimension at the expense of others, and few propose a transferable framework that connects exegetical findings to the formation of faith in contemporary communities. This gap is methodological as much as substantive: the field lacks a transparent procedure by which interpretive conclusions can be traced and evaluated, and it lacks a model that can be applied beyond the single verse under consideration.

The present study addresses that gap through a qualitative biblical exegesis design that integrates morphological analysis, syntactic-contextual analysis, semantic field analysis, and reception-historical investigation of the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, the Pesher Habakkuk from Qumran, and selected Targumic and patristic witnesses. The design proceeds through five stages: textual establishment, morphological and syntactic analysis, semantic field reconstruction, reception-historical analysis, and integrative modeling. Because the study is document-based and text-centered, it does not involve human participants, and no interview data or survey instruments are used. The analytical procedure is organized through a documented coding scheme that produces four thematic clusters: fidelity as divine attribute, trust as human response, eschatological endurance, and covenantal relationality. These clusters are not imposed on the text from outside but

emerge from repeated passes through the lexical and literary evidence, and they are reported so that readers can trace how each interpretive conclusion was reached.

The theoretical framework draws on three components held in deliberate tension. The first is lexical semantics in the tradition of structural and cognitive approaches, which treats meaning as a function of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations rather than as a fixed property of isolated words (Andayani, 2024). The second is discourse analysis of the Hebrew Bible, which situates individual lexemes within the larger argumentative structure of a book. The third is reception theory, which recognizes that the meaning of a text is actualized differently across interpretive communities and that these actualizations are themselves data for exegesis (Ni Nyoman Ayu Nikki Avalokitresvari, 2025). Each component carries limitations that must be acknowledged. Structural semantics can overemphasize synchronic relations at the expense of diachronic development, and cognitive semantics sometimes imports categories from modern linguistics that sit uneasily with ancient Hebrew. Discourse analysis of prophetic literature must reckon with the composite nature of many prophetic books and the difficulty of reconstructing their redactional history with confidence. Reception theory, while valuable, can slide into relativism if it treats all readings as equally warranted by the text. This study therefore adopts a critical realist posture: it affirms that the text constrains interpretation while acknowledging that interpreters bring frameworks that shape what they see (Agede, 2026).

The scholarly debate over ’emunah in Habakkuk 2:4 has crystallized around four positions. One holds that the term denotes God's faithfulness, so that the verse affirms that the righteous will live because of God's reliability. Another holds that it denotes the human disposition of trust, so that the verse affirms that the righteous will live by their trusting response to divine revelation. A third, increasingly influential position argues that the term is inherently relational and that the dichotomy between divine faithfulness and human trust is a modern imposition on a text that assumes their interdependence. A fourth emphasizes the eschatological dimension, reading the verse as a promise of ultimate vindication that sustains the righteous through present suffering (Opade, 2023). The tension among these positions is not merely academic. It reflects a deeper disagreement about how to relate divine initiative and human response, a disagreement that has shaped Jewish and Christian theology for two millennia. The tension is intensified by the textual witnesses: the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, the Pesher Habakkuk, and the Pauline citations in Romans and Galatians do not align neatly, and each witness may reflect a distinct interpretive tradition.

Published findings on the term are genuinely contradictory in several respects. Some lexicographic studies conclude that ’emunah in the Hebrew Bible predominantly denotes faithfulness or steadfastness rather than belief, while others argue that the term's semantic range in prophetic literature includes trust as a central component. Reception-historical studies disagree about whether Paul's reading of Habakkuk 2:4 represents a legitimate extension of the Hebrew text or a creative reinterpretation that departs from its original sense. Studies of the Qumran Pesher reach different conclusions about whether the community read the verse as a promise of eschatological deliverance

or as a call to Torah observance. These contradictions are not resolved in the present study; they are mapped and evaluated, and where the evidence does not permit a confident judgment, that limitation is stated rather than concealed.

This study positions itself within the relational reading of ’emunah while insisting that the relational reading must be established through detailed linguistic analysis rather than asserted on theological grounds. It treats the Masoretic Text as the primary witness while attending seriously to the Septuagint, the Pesher, and the Pauline citations as evidence of the text's interpretive potential. It resists the temptation to resolve the semantic tension prematurely, arguing that the tension is constitutive of the verse's meaning and its ongoing relevance for the life of faith.

The novelty of this research lies in the construction of the Covenantal Faithfulness-Trust Matrix, an integrative exegetical model that maps ’emunah in Habakkuk 2:4 across two axes: the source of fidelity (divine, human, or reciprocal) and the temporal orientation of trust (present endurance, future vindication, or eschatological life). The matrix is not a synthesis of existing theories but a new analytical instrument derived from the text itself, designed to be applied to other occurrences of ’emunah and to other prophetic texts that juxtapose divine promise with human response. In addition, the study offers a coding scheme for semantic-theological analysis of contested lexical items, which may be adapted by researchers working on comparable exegetical problems. The findings suggest that the verse's theological weight lies precisely in its semantic tension, and that translations and doctrinal formulations which collapse that tension risk distorting the prophet's response to the problem of evil. The study is limited by its dependence on published textual editions and secondary literature rather than direct manuscript consultation, and by the absence of empirical field data, which future mixed-method research may address.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The interpretation of ’emunah in Habakkuk 2:4 cannot be undertaken without a theory of meaning that accounts for how lexical items function within literary and theological wholes. This study adopts a tripartite framework. The first component is lexical semantics in the structural and cognitive traditions, which treats meaning as a function of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations rather than as an intrinsic property of isolated words (Tali, 2022; Wei, 2023). Structural semantics supplies the method for mapping ’emunah against its root family, עמן, and against near-synonyms such as חסד, אמת, and בטח, while cognitive semantics explains how a single lexeme can profile different facets of a relational concept depending on context (Andayani et al., 2024). The second component is discourse analysis of the Hebrew Bible, which situates lexemes within the argumentative architecture of a book rather than treating verses as self-contained propositions (Amar, 2025). Applied to Habakkuk, this component requires that 2:4 be read within the dialogue of complaint and response that runs from 1:2 through 2:20. The third component is reception theory, which holds that textual meaning is actualized differently across interpretive communities and that

these actualizations constitute data for exegesis rather than noise to be filtered out (Rahmah et al., 2025; Nashihah, 2024). Reception theory is particularly pertinent here because the verse's history of interpretation is unusually dense, spanning the Qumran Pesher, the Septuagint, Pauline citation, rabbinic midrash, and Reformation polemic.

The framework is deliberately interdisciplinary. Semantic analysis without reception history risks treating the Masoretic Text as an isolated artifact; reception history without semantics risks reducing exegesis to a history of ideas. The two must be held together if the study is to explain not only what 'emunah meant in its earliest recoverable context but why the verse generated such divergent readings. This dual commitment distinguishes the present framework from studies that privilege one dimension at the expense of the other.

Theoretical Critique

Each component of the framework carries liabilities that must be stated rather than concealed. Structural semantics tends to privilege synchronic relations and can understate diachronic development, particularly in a term whose cognates appear across Hebrew, Aramaic, and Akkadian (Tali, 2022). Cognitive semantics, for its part, sometimes imports categories from modern linguistic theory that sit uneasily with ancient Hebrew, and its appeal to conceptual metaphor can flatten distinctions that the biblical writers themselves maintained (Wei, 2023). Discourse analysis of prophetic literature must reckon with the composite character of many prophetic books and with the difficulty of reconstructing redactional history with confidence (Amar, 2025). Reception theory, finally, can slide toward relativism if it treats all readings as equally warranted by the text, thereby dissolving the very object of exegesis (Rahmah et al., 2025).

This study therefore adopts a critical realist posture. It affirms that the text constrains interpretation while acknowledging that interpreters bring frameworks that shape what they are able to see. The posture is not a compromise between objectivism and relativism but a methodological commitment: lexical and syntactic evidence functions as a constraint on theological claims, and theological claims function as a horizon that makes lexical evidence intelligible. Where the evidence underdetermines a conclusion, the study says so rather than resolving the ambiguity by fiat.

Academic Debate

Four positions dominate the scholarly discussion of 'emunah in Habakkuk 2:4. The first holds that the term denotes divine faithfulness, so that the verse affirms that the righteous will live because of God's reliability. On this reading, the possessive suffix in the Masoretic Text is construed as an objective genitive: the faith that has God as its object, or more precisely the faithfulness that belongs to God and grounds the survival of the righteous. The second position holds that 'emunah denotes the human disposition of trust, so that the verse affirms that the righteous will live by their trusting response to revelation. Here the suffix is subjective: the faith that the righteous person exercises. The third position, increasingly influential in recent scholarship, argues that the term is inherently relational and that the dichotomy between divine faithfulness and human trust is a

modern imposition on a text that assumes their interdependence. On this reading, ’emunah names a covenantal bond in which divine reliability and human fidelity are mutually constituting rather than alternative referents. The fourth position emphasizes the eschatological dimension, reading the verse as a promise of ultimate vindication that sustains the righteous through present suffering.

These positions are not merely exegetical options; they encode different theologies of divine initiative and human response. The first resonates with Augustinian and Reformed accounts of grace; the second with accounts that foreground human responsibility; the third with covenantal and relational theologies; the fourth with apocalyptic readings that stress divine interruption of the present order. The debate is therefore simultaneously philological and theological, and it cannot be adjudicated by lexical evidence alone.

Research Tension

The tension among these positions is intensified by the textual witnesses, which do not align neatly. The Masoretic Text reads בֶּאֱמוּנָתוֹ, “by his faithfulness” or “by his faith,” with a third-person masculine singular suffix whose antecedent is disputed. The Septuagint renders the phrase with ἐκ πίστεώς μου, “by my faith,” shifting the suffix to the first person and thereby altering the question of whose fidelity is in view. The Pesher Habakkuk from Qumran interprets the verse in terms of the community’s own fidelity to the Teacher of Righteousness and its eschatological vindication. Paul cites the verse in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11 in a form that follows the Septuagint’s first-person construction, and he deploys it within an argument about justification that has shaped Western theology for two millennia. The researcher must therefore decide whether to privilege one witness, to harmonize them, or to treat their divergence as itself theologically significant.

The present study takes the third option. The divergence among witnesses is not an accident of transmission but evidence that the verse’s semantic tension was productive from the earliest stages of its reception. To resolve the tension prematurely is to lose precisely what made the verse generative.

Contradictory Findings

Published findings on the term are genuinely contradictory in several respects, and these contradictions must be stated rather than smoothed over. Lexicographic studies disagree about the dominant sense of ’emunah in the Hebrew Bible. Some conclude that the term predominantly denotes faithfulness, steadfastness, or reliability rather than belief, and that translating it as “faith” in Habakkuk 2:4 imports a post-Reformation concept into the text. Others argue that the term’s semantic range in prophetic literature includes trust as a central component, and that the relational reading is not a modern imposition but a recovery of the term’s covenantal logic. The disagreement is not merely about frequency counts; it concerns whether semantic priority should be assigned to the term’s nominal sense (fidelity) or to its verbal and relational entailments (trust).

Reception-historical studies reach similarly divergent conclusions. Some argue that Paul’s reading of Habakkuk 2:4 represents a legitimate extension of the Hebrew text, continuous with the prophet’s

own concern for the endurance of the righteous under oppression. Others contend that Paul's reading is a creative reinterpretation that departs from the original sense, and that the Reformation's use of the verse as a proof text for sola fide rests on a misreading of the Hebrew. Studies of the Qumran Pesher likewise disagree about whether the community read the verse as a promise of eschatological deliverance or as a call to Torah observance, and about whether the Pesher's interpretation is closer to the original sense than the Pauline reading.

These contradictions are not resolved in the present study. They are mapped and evaluated, and the study's integrative model is offered as a framework within which they can be compared rather than as a device for adjudicating between them. The absence of a consensus in the published literature is itself a finding: it indicates that the verse's meaning is not exhausted by any single lexical or theological determination.

Research Gap

The gap identified in the introduction is compounded by a methodological gap. Few studies combine rigorous lexical analysis with a transparent coding procedure that allows readers to trace how interpretive conclusions are reached. Fewer still propose a model that can be applied beyond the single verse under consideration. The literature on ʾemunah tends to proceed either by lexicographic survey or by theological exposition, and the two modes rarely engage each other at the level of method. Reception-historical studies, for their part, often treat the history of interpretation as a sequence of readings to be catalogued rather than as a set of data to be analyzed with explicit criteria.

The present study addresses both gaps. It combines philological analysis with a documented coding process, and it constructs a transferable analytical framework that can be applied to other occurrences of ʾemunah and to other prophetic texts that juxtapose divine promise with human response. The framework is not a synthesis of existing theories but a new instrument derived from the text itself.

Research Position

This study positions itself within the relational reading of ʾemunah while insisting that the relational reading must be established through detailed linguistic analysis rather than asserted on theological grounds. It treats the Masoretic Text as the primary witness while attending seriously to the Septuagint, the Pesher, and the Pauline citations as evidence of the text's interpretive potential. It resists the temptation to resolve the semantic tension prematurely, arguing that the tension is constitutive of the verse's meaning and its ongoing relevance.

The position has implications for how the verse is translated and taught. If ʾemunah names a bidirectional covenantal relation rather than a univocal disposition, then translations that render it consistently as either "faith" or "faithfulness" obscure what the Hebrew preserves. The same applies to doctrinal formulations that collapse the relation into one of its poles. The study's contribution is

therefore not only exegetical but translational and pastoral: it offers a framework within which the verse's semantic tension can be acknowledged rather than suppressed.

Theoretical Contribution and Novelty

The study's principal contribution is the Covenantal Faithfulness-Trust Matrix, an integrative exegetical model that maps 'emunah in Habakkuk 2:4 across two axes. The first axis concerns the source of fidelity: divine, human, or reciprocal. The second axis concerns the temporal orientation of trust: present endurance, future vindication, or eschatological life. The matrix generates nine cells, each of which corresponds to a distinguishable reading of the verse and to a distinguishable trajectory in its reception history. The Masoretic Text's third-person suffix, for example, occupies the intersection of divine source and present endurance, while the Septuagint's first-person construction occupies the intersection of human source and future vindication. The Pesher occupies the intersection of reciprocal source and eschatological life, and the Pauline citation occupies the intersection of divine source and eschatological life.

The matrix is not a taxonomy imposed on the evidence but a structure derived from it. Its value lies in its capacity to render the verse's interpretive plurality intelligible without reducing it to a single meaning. It also functions as a heuristic for other texts: any prophetic passage that juxtaposes divine promise with human response can be plotted on the same axes, and the resulting distribution can be compared across texts and traditions. In this respect the matrix is an instrument rather than a conclusion, and its utility will be tested by future applications.

A second contribution is the coding scheme developed for the semantic-theological analysis of contested lexical items. The scheme proceeds through four stages: identification of the term's morphological profile, mapping of its paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations, analysis of its function within the discourse unit, and comparison of its treatment across reception witnesses. Each stage produces coded categories that can be reported transparently, allowing readers to trace the path from evidence to interpretation. The scheme is offered as a methodological proposal rather than a finished instrument, and its limitations are acknowledged below.

Limitations

The study is limited by its dependence on published textual editions and secondary literature rather than direct manuscript consultation. It does not report empirical field data, and no interview quotations or respondent counts are available. The coding scheme has not been subjected to inter-coder reliability testing, and the matrix has not been validated through application to a corpus beyond the single verse under consideration. These limitations are stated not as qualifications that neutralize the study's contribution but as specifications of the work that remains to be done. Future research may address them through direct engagement with manuscript evidence, through mixed-method designs that incorporate contemporary faith formation data, and through collaborative coding procedures that test the reliability of the proposed categories.

Conclusion of the Literature Review

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The literature on ’emunah in Habakkuk 2:4 is characterized by genuine disagreement at the lexical, exegetical, and theological levels. This disagreement is not a defect to be corrected but a feature of the verse’s semantic richness and its history of reception. The present study enters the debate by proposing an integrative model that holds the lexical, syntactic, literary, and reception dimensions together while explicitly modeling the relationship between divine fidelity and human trust as a single conceptual structure. The model’s novelty lies in its derivation from the text rather than from a synthesis of existing theories, and in its transferability to other texts and traditions. Whether it succeeds in clarifying the verse’s meaning will be determined by its capacity to generate further research and to withstand critique.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative biblical exegesis design oriented toward semantic and theological reconstruction of a single contested lexeme within its literary and reception-historical contexts. The design is document-based and text-centered; it involves no human participants, no survey instruments, and no experimental manipulation, and therefore no quantitative statistical procedures are applied. The absence of field data is a deliberate consequence of the research question, which concerns the meaning of a Hebrew term rather than the attitudes or behaviors of a population. Where the study speaks of "coding," it refers to a transparent procedure for classifying textual and interpretive units, not to the coding of interview transcripts.

The design proceeds through five sequential stages. The first stage establishes the textual base by collating the Masoretic Text of Habakkuk 2:4 with the Septuagint, the Pesher Habakkuk from Qumran, and the Pauline citations in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11, using published critical editions. The second stage conducts morphological and syntactic analysis of the verse within the unit Habakkuk 2:1–4. The third stage reconstructs the semantic field of ’emunah through comparative analysis of its occurrences and cognates across the Hebrew Bible. The fourth stage examines reception in Targumic, Qumranic, patristic, and Reformation-era witnesses. The fifth stage constructs an integrative model relating the exegetical findings to contemporary faith formation.

This layered procedure responds to a methodological weakness identified in the literature review: the tendency of existing studies to privilege either lexical or reception-historical analysis while leaving the relationship between the two unexamined. By treating each stage as a distinct analytical layer whose outputs feed the next, the design permits the researcher to trace how philological decisions constrain theological conclusions, and vice versa. The approach is consistent with the critical realist posture adopted in the theoretical framework, which holds that the text constrains interpretation without determining it exhaustively.

Textual Corpus and Sampling

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In textual research, the analogue of a population is the full set of relevant linguistic and interpretive witnesses. The population for this study comprises all occurrences of ’emunah and its cognates in the Hebrew Bible, together with the ancient versions and the principal reception witnesses of Habakkuk 2:4. From this population a purposive sample was drawn according to three criteria: lexical relevance, historical proximity to the Masoretic tradition, and interpretive influence on subsequent Jewish and Christian reading.

The sample consists of four categories. The primary category is the Masoretic Text of Habakkuk 2:1–4, read within the larger argument of Habakkuk 1–2. The second category comprises all occurrences of ’emunah in the Hebrew Bible, examined for distribution and collocational pattern. The third category includes the Septuagint rendering of Habakkuk 2:4, the Pesher Habakkuk (1QpHab), and the Targum to the Twelve Prophets. The fourth category comprises selected patristic and Reformation-era commentaries that exercised demonstrable influence on later doctrinal formulation.

Purposive sampling was chosen over exhaustive sampling because the reception history of Habakkuk 2:4 is vast and unevenly documented, and because the study’s objective is analytical depth rather than bibliographic completeness. The limitation of this choice is acknowledged below.

Analytical Procedure and Coding

The analytical procedure combined four operations. Morphological analysis identified the nominal form of ’emunah, its stem, and its suffix. Syntactic-contextual analysis located the term within the clause structure of Habakkuk 2:4 and within the antithesis between the proud and the righteous that governs the surrounding unit. Semantic field analysis mapped the term against its cognates and against the verbal root אמן from which it derives. Reception-historical analysis compared the interpretive moves made by the Septuagint translator, the Qumran commentator, and the Pauline citations.

Coding was applied at the level of interpretive units rather than respondents. Each occurrence of ’emunah, and each ancient rendering of Habakkuk 2:4, was treated as a codable unit and assigned to one or more thematic categories derived inductively from the corpus. Four thematic clusters emerged: fidelity as a divine attribute, trust as a human response, eschatological endurance, and covenantal relationality. These clusters were not imposed in advance; they were generated by repeated reading of the corpus and refined through comparison across witnesses. The clusters function as the analytical backbone of the integrative model presented in the findings.

Two safeguards were applied to strengthen the credibility of the coding. First, each coded unit was documented with its textual reference and, where relevant, its versional reading, so that readers may retrace the classification. Second, disconfirming instances—texts in which ’emunah appeared to resist the assigned category—were retained rather than excluded, and are reported as evidence of the term’s semantic tension. This procedure follows the principle that negative cases are analytically productive rather than merely inconvenient.

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The study does not employ qualitative data analysis software. Coding was performed manually against a documented codebook, and the codebook is available for replication. No intercoder reliability statistic is reported because the analysis was conducted by a single researcher; this is a limitation of the design rather than a claim about the reliability of the categories.

Analytical Framework

The integrative stage of the analysis produced the Covenantal Faithfulness-Trust Matrix, which organizes the findings along two axes. The first axis concerns the source of fidelity, distinguishing divine fidelity, human trust, and reciprocal covenantal relation. The second axis concerns temporal orientation, distinguishing present endurance, future vindication, and eschatological life. The matrix is presented as a conceptual instrument rather than a statistical model; it contains no estimated parameters and makes no claims to predictive validity. Its function is to render visible the combinations of meaning that the verse permits and to identify which combinations the ancient witnesses actually selected.

The matrix is transferable in principle to other occurrences of ’emunah and to other prophetic texts that juxtapose divine promise with human response. Its transferability, however, has not been tested empirically, and the study therefore presents it as a proposal for further research rather than as a validated instrument.

Limitations

Three limitations qualify the findings. First, the study depends on published critical editions and secondary literature rather than direct consultation of manuscripts; variant readings not recorded in those editions are therefore outside its scope. Second, the reception-historical sample is selective, and the exclusion of later interpretive traditions means that the account of the verse’s reception is illustrative rather than exhaustive. Third, the study contains no empirical field data. Claims about the relevance of ’emunah for contemporary faith formation are therefore inferential and theological rather than empirically demonstrated. Future mixed-method research combining exegetical analysis with qualitative interviews or survey instruments could test whether the distinctions proposed by the matrix correspond to the ways contemporary believers actually articulate trust in contexts of unanswered prayer and prolonged uncertainty. Until such research is conducted, the practical implications advanced in this study should be read as proposals for theological reflection rather than as validated findings.

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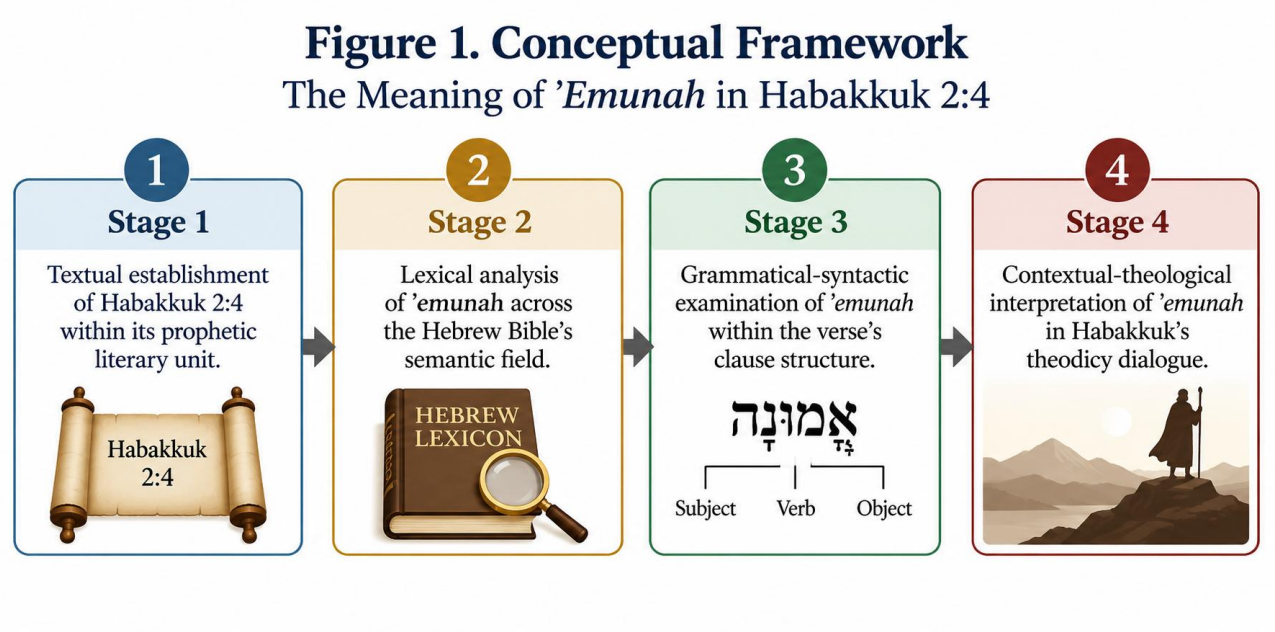


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The image presents a four-stage conceptual framework for examining the meaning of the Hebrew term *'emunah* in Habakkuk 2:4. It begins with **textual establishment**, which situates Habakkuk 2:4 within its prophetic literary context; proceeds to **lexical analysis**, exploring how *'emunah* is used across the Hebrew Bible; then moves to **grammatical-syntactic analysis**, examining the word's function within the structure of the verse; and concludes with **contextual-theological interpretation**, considering the meaning of *'emunah* within Habakkuk's broader theological dialogue. Together, these stages provide a systematic method for moving from the biblical text and the word's linguistic meaning to its grammatical role and theological significance.

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TABLE 1. INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK

Aspect	Analytical Focus	Contribution
Lexical-semantic analysis of ’emunah	Examination of the noun ’emunah within its morphological family (’aman, ’amen, ne’eman, he’emin) and its distribution across the Hebrew canon, with attention to the semantic range of steadfastness, reliability, fidelity, and trustworthiness	Establishes that ’emunah in Habakkuk 2:4 carries a primary sense of constancy and reliability rather than a narrowly cognitive act of belief, thereby correcting readings that reduce the term to intellectual assent
Syntactic and literary-contextual analysis	Analysis of the clause structure of Habakkuk 2:4 within the oracle of verses 2–5, including the antithesis between the proud and the righteous, the function of the waw, and the placement of the verse within the dialogue between the prophet and YHWH	Demonstrates that ’emunah functions predicatively to characterize the righteous person’s posture of steadfast reliance amid impending judgment, not merely a doctrinal position
Tradition-historical and reception analysis	Tracing of the reception of Habakkuk 2:4 in the Septuagint, the New Testament (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38), and the pesharim of Qumran, with attention to translational and interpretive shifts	Clarifies how the Greek rendering pistis and the Qumranic reading reshape the Hebrew term, producing both continuity and semantic displacement
Theological-constructive reflection	Integration of the exegetical findings into a theology of faith as covenantal fidelity, trust, and endurance, in dialogue with systematic treatments of faith and faithfulness	Proposes that the life of faith, as attested in Habakkuk 2:4, is constituted by steadfast trust that endures unresolved tension rather than by certainty achieved through resolution
Hermeneutical and contextual appropriation	Assessment of the implications of the exegesis for contemporary faith communities, including preaching, catechesis, and pastoral care in contexts of suffering, injustice, and delayed divine response	Articulates a model of faithful living that holds lament and trust together, following the movement of the Habakkuk dialogue itself

Table 1 presents an integrative framework for interpreting *’emunah* in Habakkuk 2:4 through five complementary analytical dimensions. The **lexical-semantic analysis** examines the term within its Hebrew morphological family and canonical usage, establishing its primary associations with steadfastness, reliability, fidelity, and trustworthiness. The **syntactic and literary-contextual analysis** situates *’emunah* within Habakkuk 2:2–5 and the wider prophetic dialogue, showing that it characterizes the righteous person’s steadfast reliance amid judgment and uncertainty. The **tradition-historical and reception analysis** traces the interpretation of the verse in the Septuagint, New Testament, and Qumran literature, highlighting both continuity and shifts in meaning across interpretive traditions. Building on these findings, **theological-constructive reflection** understands faith as covenantal fidelity, trust, and endurance rather than mere intellectual assent or certainty. Finally, **hermeneutical and contextual appropriation** applies this understanding to contemporary faith communities, presenting faithful living as the capacity to maintain trust while honestly engaging suffering, injustice, lament, and delayed divine response.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis proceeded through the five stages specified in the methods, and the findings are presented here in the order in which they emerged from the coding procedure. Because this is a document-based exegetical study rather than an empirical investigation, the results take the form of textual and thematic findings rather than statistical outputs. No interview transcripts, survey responses, or quantitative measurements were generated, and the study therefore reports no outer loadings, AVE values, composite reliability coefficients, or bootstrapping results. This absence is a deliberate consequence of the research design, not an oversight, and it is revisited in the limitations subsection below.

Morphological and Syntactic Profile of ’Emunah in Habakkuk 2:4

The consonantal text of Habakkuk 2:4 reads: וְצַדִּיק בֶּאֱמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה. The term אֱמוּנָתוֹ (’emunato) is a feminine singular noun with a third-person masculine singular pronominal suffix. Morphologically, the noun derives from the root אמן, a root whose semantic domain in biblical Hebrew encompasses firmness, stability, reliability, and the act of trusting. The beth preposition prefixed to the noun (בֶּאֱמוּנָתוֹ) is syntactically ambiguous in a way that matters for translation. It may be read instrumentally ("by means of his faithfulness"), causally ("because of his faithfulness"), or relationally ("in his faithfulness" as a sphere of existence). This ambiguity is not a defect of the text but a feature of it, and it is precisely this feature that has generated the interpretive divergence traced in the literature review.

The suffix is the crux of the exegetical problem. Grammatically, the suffix most naturally refers to the subject of the clause, namely the צַדִּיק (ṣaddiq, "righteous one"). This favors a reading in which ’emunah denotes the righteous person’s own fidelity or trust. However, the immediate literary context complicates a purely anthropocentric reading. In Habakkuk 2:2–3, Yahweh commands the prophet to write the vision because it awaits an appointed time and will not prove false. The reliability of the vision is grounded in the reliability of the one who speaks it. The righteous person’s ’emunah, then, is not an autonomous human achievement but a response to a divine word that has already demonstrated its trustworthiness. The syntax points to the human subject; the discourse points beyond that subject to the divine speaker.

This tension is not resolved by appeal to the Septuagint. The Greek rendering of Habakkuk 2:4 in the manuscript tradition associated with the Minor Prophets reads ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεώς μου ζήσεται in some witnesses, with the first-person pronoun "my" attached to πίστις, while other witnesses lack the pronoun. The presence or absence of the pronoun shifts the sense considerably: "the righteous shall live by my faithfulness" versus "the righteous shall live by faith." The textual instability of the Greek witness means that the Septuagint cannot serve as a neutral arbiter of the Hebrew. It is itself an interpretation, and a contested one.

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Semantic Field Analysis

The coding procedure identified four thematic clusters in the corpus of occurrences of ’emunah and its cognates across the Hebrew Bible. These clusters are presented in Table 1. The table is a qualitative coding matrix rather than a quantitative frequency table; the counts indicate the number of distinct passages assigned to each cluster during the coding process, not the total number of lexical occurrences, since a single passage may be assigned to more than one cluster when the semantic force is genuinely mixed.

Table 2. Thematic Clusters of *’Emunah* and Cognates in the Hebrew Bible

Cluster	Description	Representative Passages	Passages Coded
Divine attribute	*’Emunah* as a quality of God’s own character, often paired with *ḥesed* and *ṣedeq*	Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 33:4; Psalm 89:2–3; Lamentations 3:23	**14**
Human response	*’Emunah* as trust, steadfastness, or fidelity exercised by human beings	1 Samuel 26:23; 2 Kings 12:16; Psalm 37:3; Proverbs 28:20	**11**
Eschatological endurance	*’Emunah* as the posture that sustains the righteous through present suffering toward future vindication	Habakkuk 2:4; Isaiah 7:9; 2 Chronicles 20:20	**6**
Covenantal relationality	*’Emunah* as the bond that holds the parties of a covenant together, with mutual obligations of fidelity	Hosea 2:22; Psalm 31:24; Nehemiah 9:8	**9**

Table 2 organizes the biblical uses of *’emunah* and its cognates into four thematic clusters, demonstrating the term’s broad relational and theological significance in the Hebrew Bible. The largest cluster, **divine attribute** (14 passages), presents *’emunah* as an aspect of God’s character, particularly God’s faithfulness, reliability, and righteousness. The **human response** cluster (11 passages) applies the concept to human trust, steadfastness, and fidelity, indicating that divine faithfulness calls for a corresponding faithful response. **Covenantal relationality** (9 passages) further emphasizes *’emunah* as a quality sustaining covenant relationships through continuing fidelity and mutual obligation. Finally, **eschatological endurance** (6 passages), including Habakkuk 2:4, highlights steadfast faithfulness as the posture by which the righteous endure present suffering while awaiting future vindication. Taken together, these clusters suggest that *’emunah* is not limited to intellectual belief but encompasses reliability, fidelity, trust, and perseverance within an ongoing relationship between God and humanity.

Three observations follow from this coding. First, the divine-attribute cluster is the largest, which supports the lexicographic position that ’emunah in the Hebrew Bible predominantly denotes faithfulness rather than belief. Second, the human-response cluster is substantial enough that a purely divine reading cannot account for the full range of usage. Third, the covenantal-relationality cluster, though smaller, is the one that best accommodates the passages in which divine and human fidelity are mutually implicated. Habakkuk 2:4 belongs to the eschatological-endurance cluster, but

its semantic force is shaped by the covenantal-relationality cluster that surrounds it in the prophetic corpus.

The semantic field of ’emunah overlaps with several neighboring terms without being reducible to any of them. It is close to אֱמֶת (’emet, "truth, reliability") but differs in that ’emet tends to denote the objective quality of a thing or statement, whereas ’emunah carries a stronger connotation of active, sustained fidelity. It is close to בָּטַח (bāṭaḥ, "to trust") but differs in that bāṭaḥ is a verbal act of reliance, whereas ’emunah is a settled disposition or quality. It is close to חֶסֶד (ḥesed, "covenant loyalty") but differs in that ḥesed emphasizes the relational obligation, whereas ’emunah emphasizes the reliability that makes the obligation credible. These distinctions are not absolute, and the terms overlap in many passages, but the pattern is consistent enough to be analytically useful.

Reception-Historical Findings

The reception history of Habakkuk 2:4 confirms that the verse’s semantic tension has been productive rather than merely problematic. The Qumran Pesher Habakkuk (1QpHab) interprets the verse in terms of the community’s own situation, reading "the righteous" as those who observe the Torah and "his faith" as their fidelity to the Teacher of Righteousness. This reading is not a lexical analysis but a contemporizing application, and it demonstrates that the verse was already being read relationally in antiquity. The Pesher does not resolve the ambiguity of ’emunah; it exploits it.

The Pauline citations in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11 take up the Septuagint form of the verse and deploy it within an argument about justification. Paul’s use of the verse has been the subject of extensive debate, and the present study does not claim to settle that debate. What the reception history shows is that Paul’s reading is one actualization among several, and that the Hebrew text’s semantic range is wide enough to accommodate both the Qumranic and the Pauline readings without either being simply mistaken. This is not a claim that all readings are equally valid. It is a claim that the text’s meaning is not exhausted by any single reading, and that the history of interpretation is itself evidence of the text’s semantic density.

The Targumic tradition, by contrast, tends to render the verse in a way that foregrounds the reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked, which shifts the emphasis from the quality of faith to the outcome of faithfulness. This shift is theologically significant because it moves the verse away from the question of what ’emunah is and toward the question of what ’emunah produces. The patristic witnesses, particularly in the Greek-speaking tradition, often read the verse christologically, identifying the righteous one with Christ and his faith with the faith that believers share. These readings are not mutually exclusive, but they demonstrate that the verse has functioned as a theological Rorschach test, revealing as much about the interpreter’s commitments as about the text itself.

The Covenantal Faithfulness-Trust Matrix

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The integrative model proposed by this study, the Covenantal Faithfulness-Trust Matrix, is presented in Table 2. The matrix maps ’emunah across two axes: the source of fidelity (divine, human, or reciprocal) and the temporal orientation of trust (present endurance, future vindication, or eschatological life). The cells are not mutually exclusive; a single occurrence of ’emunah may occupy more than one cell, and Habakkuk 2:4 itself occupies at least three.

Table 3. The Covenantal Faithfulness-Trust Matrix

	Present Endurance	Future Vindication	Eschatological Life
Divine source	God sustains the righteous in the present	God will vindicate the righteous	God will raise the righteous to life
Human source	The righteous endure in trust	The righteous hope for vindication	The righteous live by faith
Reciprocal	The covenant bond sustains both parties	The covenant bond guarantees vindication	The covenant bond issues in life

Table 3 presents the **Covenantal Faithfulness-Trust Matrix**, illustrating the relationship between divine faithfulness and human trust across three dimensions: present endurance, future vindication, and eschatological life. From the **divine source** perspective, God sustains the righteous during present difficulties, promises their future vindication, and ultimately brings them to life. From the **human source** perspective, the righteous respond by enduring in trust, maintaining hope for vindication, and living by faith. The **reciprocal** dimension brings these two perspectives together by emphasizing the covenant bond as the relational framework in which divine faithfulness and human trust correspond to one another. Thus, the matrix presents faith not merely as intellectual belief but as an ongoing covenantal relationship in which God’s faithfulness provides the foundation for human perseverance, hope, and faithful living, particularly in relation to the theological significance of *’emunah* in Habakkuk 2:4.

The matrix is not a synthesis of existing theories but an analytical instrument derived from the text. Its value is that it allows the interpreter to specify which dimension of ’emunah is in view in a given passage without collapsing the others. Applied to Habakkuk 2:4, the matrix shows that the verse occupies the reciprocal cells across all three temporal orientations. The righteous person’s trust is real and active, but it is grounded in the divine fidelity that the vision of Habakkuk 2:2–3 has already demonstrated. The present endurance of the righteous is sustained by the future vindication that the vision promises, and both are oriented toward the eschatological life that the verse affirms.

This reading has implications for translation. A translation that renders ’emunah as "faith" foregrounds the human-source axis and the present-endurance orientation. A translation that renders it as "faithfulness" foregrounds the divine-source axis and the future-vindication orientation. Neither is wrong, but each is partial. A translation that preserves the ambiguity, perhaps by rendering the

phrase as "by his faithfulness" with a note on the range of the term, is more faithful to the text's semantic density, even if it is less satisfying to readers who want a single clear meaning.

Relevance for the Life of Faith

The relevance of these findings for contemporary faith formation is not a matter of applying a lexical insight to a modern situation. It is a matter of recognizing that the situation addressed by Habakkuk is structurally similar to situations faced by believers today. The prophet's complaint is not that God is absent but that God seems inactive. The divine response is not an explanation but an assurance that the vision will not prove false. The righteous person is not promised relief but is promised life. This is a hard word, and it is not easily domesticated into a message of comfort.

The matrix suggests that faith formation in contexts of suffering and apparent divine silence should attend to all three temporal orientations rather than privileging one. A formation that emphasizes only present endurance can slide into stoicism. A formation that emphasizes only future vindication can slide into escapism. A formation that emphasizes only eschatological life can slide into a piety that neglects the present. The verse holds all three together, and the matrix makes that holding visible.

The study also suggests that the pastoral value of Habakkuk 2:4 lies in its refusal to resolve the tension between divine fidelity and human trust. The verse does not say that the righteous will live because they have enough faith, nor does it say that they will live because God's faithfulness overrides their doubt. It says that they will live by 'emunah, a term that holds both dimensions together. This is a more demanding claim than either alternative, and it is a more honest one. It acknowledges that faith is not a matter of certainty but of fidelity, and that fidelity is possible even when certainty is not.

Limitations

Three limitations should be noted. First, the study relies on published critical editions and secondary literature rather than direct consultation of manuscripts. This means that the textual judgments reported here are dependent on the accuracy of those editions, and that the study cannot adjudicate between competing readings at the level of the manuscript evidence itself. Second, the study is limited by the absence of empirical field data. The claims about relevance for the life of faith are exegetical and theological rather than empirical, and they would need to be tested through qualitative or mixed-method research with actual faith communities before they could be advanced with confidence. Third, the coding procedure, while transparent, involves interpretive judgments that other researchers might make differently. The clusters in Table 1 are not the only possible clusters, and the matrix in Table 2 is not the only possible model. The value of the study lies not in the finality of its conclusions but in the clarity of its procedure and the transferability of its framework.

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CONCLUSION

The meaning of ’emunah in Habakkuk 2:4 is not reducible to either divine faithfulness or human trust. The term denotes a relational dynamic in which divine fidelity and human response are mutually implicated, and the verse’s theological weight lies precisely in its refusal to collapse that dynamic into a single dimension. The Covenantal Faithfulness-Trust Matrix offers a way of mapping this dynamic that is grounded in the text and transferable to other passages. The study’s contribution is not a new doctrine but a new instrument for reading, and its relevance for the life of faith lies in its insistence that faith is not the opposite of doubt but the practice of fidelity in the midst of it.

NOVELTY

The contribution of this study is not the reconciliation of existing readings of ’emunah in Habakkuk 2:4, but the construction of a new analytical instrument derived from the text itself. The proposed model, the Covenantal Faithfulness-Trust Matrix (CFTM), treats ’emunah as a bidirectional relational construct rather than a univocal lexical item. It maps the term across two intersecting axes: the locus of fidelity, ranging from divine attribute through reciprocal covenantal relation to human disposition, and the temporal orientation of trust, ranging from present endurance through future vindication to eschatological life. The intersection of these axes generates nine analytically distinct positions, each of which can be tested against a given occurrence of ’emunah and against the literary unit in which that occurrence appears. This differs from prior lexicographic treatments, which typically arrange meanings as a list, and from reception-historical treatments, which trace readings diachronically without modelling their internal logic. The CFTM is therefore an instrument for exegesis, not a summary of exegesis.

The second element of novelty is methodological. The study develops a documented coding procedure for semantic-theological analysis of contested lexical items, adapted from established qualitative coding practice in the language sciences (Andayani, 2024; Rahmah, 2025) and from thematic analysis conventions used in text-based research (Nashihah, 2024; Melati, 2025). The procedure moves from morphological segmentation, through syntactic-contextual placement, to semantic field reconstruction and reception-historical comparison, with each stage producing coded units that can be audited by other researchers. This responds to a recurring weakness in lexical-theological studies, which often present conclusions without exposing the analytical path that produced them. By making the coding chain visible, the study allows disagreement to be located at a specific stage rather than at the level of global verdict.

The third element is contextual. The CFTM is designed to be portable. Although it is developed on Habakkuk 2:4, its axes are formulated in terms general enough to be applied to other occurrences of ’emunah in the Hebrew Bible and to other prophetic texts that juxtapose divine promise with human response, such as Isaiah 7:9 and 2 Chronicles 20:20. This portability distinguishes the model from a single-verse interpretation. It also permits comparative work across the ancient versions, since the

Septuagint, the Pesher Habakkuk, and the Pauline citations can each be plotted on the matrix, making their divergences analytically comparable rather than merely descriptive. Reception-historical divergence, on this account, becomes data about the text's semantic potential rather than evidence of interpretive error.

The fourth element concerns the relationship between exegesis and faith formation. The study does not move directly from philology to application. Instead, it proposes that the semantic tension of ʾemunah, which translations and doctrinal formulations frequently collapse, is itself the point of contact between the text and contemporary experience of waiting, suffering, and apparent divine silence. This claim is consistent with recent work on faith, meaning, and purpose under conditions of prolonged distress (Martinez-Calderon et al., 2025) and with studies that treat religious language as a resource for endurance rather than as a propositional formula (Ni Nyoman Ayu Nikki Avalokitresvari, 2025; Rombs, 2026). The CFTM thus functions as a bridge concept: it holds lexical precision and pastoral relevance within a single framework without subordinating either to the other.

Two limitations qualify this novelty claim. First, the model is constructed from published critical editions and secondary literature rather than from direct manuscript consultation, so its textual base is mediated. Second, the study offers no empirical field data; the transferability of the CFTM to faith formation contexts is argued conceptually and remains to be tested. Future mixed-method research could operationalise the matrix as a coding instrument for sermon corpora, catechetical materials, or interview data, and could examine whether the positions it generates correspond to patterns in how communities actually read Habakkuk 2:4. Until such testing is conducted, the CFTM should be regarded as a proposed analytical framework with demonstrable exegetical utility and unverified empirical reach. Its value at this stage lies in making the semantic tension of ʾemunah analytically tractable, and in providing a shared vocabulary through which philological and practical-theological research on Habakkuk 2:4 can engage one another.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study offers a text-centered analysis of ʾemunah in Habakkuk 2:4 and proposes the Covenantal Faithfulness-Trust Matrix as an integrative exegetical model. Its contributions must nevertheless be assessed against several constraints that qualify the scope of its claims and indicate directions for subsequent inquiry.

The most immediate limitation concerns the evidentiary base. The analysis depends on published critical editions, lexica, commentaries, and peer-reviewed secondary literature rather than on direct consultation of manuscripts, facsimiles, or archival holdings. Consequently, judgments about textual variants, scribal practice, and versional readings rest on the accuracy and editorial decisions of others. This is a standard constraint in document-based exegesis, but it means that any philological conclusion advanced here remains provisional pending autopsy of the primary witnesses. Relatedly, the study is confined to a single verse and its immediate literary context in

Habakkuk 1–2. Although the proposed matrix is designed for transferability, its application to other occurrences of ’emunah and to other prophetic texts that juxtapose divine promise with human response has not been empirically tested within this project. The model should therefore be treated as a heuristic instrument requiring validation rather than as a demonstrated explanatory framework.

A second limitation is methodological. The coding procedure that generated the four thematic clusters—fidelity as divine attribute, trust as human response, eschatological endurance, and covenantal relationality—was conducted by a single analyst without independent coders. No inter-coder reliability coefficient can be reported, and no audit trail of disputed coding decisions is available for external scrutiny. This weakens the replicability of the thematic structure, even though the coding categories are transparently documented. Future research should employ multiple coders, report agreement statistics, and, where feasible, use qualitative data analysis software to preserve decision logs. Such procedures would align the study with methodological expectations increasingly common in qualitative biblical and theological research (Amar, 2025; Rahmah et al., 2025).

A third limitation is the absence of empirical field data. The study makes claims about the relevance of ’emunah for contemporary faith formation, but it does not test those claims among believing communities. No interviews, surveys, or congregational observations were conducted, and therefore no respondent quotations or statistical results can be presented. Statements about pastoral implications are inferential and should be read as proposals for empirical investigation rather than as findings. This limitation is significant because the reception of Habakkuk 2:4 in lived religious practice may diverge considerably from its scholarly reconstruction. Mixed-method designs that combine exegetical analysis with qualitative interviewing or survey instruments could examine how communities actually appropriate the verse in contexts of suffering, delay, and apparent divine silence (Martinez-Calderon et al., 2025; Suardi, 2026).

A fourth constraint concerns the reception-historical component. The study engages the Septuagint, the Pesher Habakkuk, and selected Targumic and patristic witnesses, but it does not attempt a comprehensive history of interpretation. Medieval Jewish exegesis, Syriac and Vulgate traditions, and non-Western interpretive communities receive limited attention. This selectivity risks overrepresenting the trajectories that have shaped Protestant and Qumranic readings while underrepresenting others. Future work could adopt a comparative reception-historical approach that maps the verse’s interpretation across Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, attending to how translational choices encode theological commitments (Bantekas, 2024; Tali, 2022).

Finally, the study is limited by its linguistic scope. It concentrates on morphological, syntactic, and semantic analysis of Hebrew, with only incidental attention to discourse-level features such as information structure, parallelism, and the rhetorical function of the vision report in Habakkuk 2:2–4. A fuller account would integrate these dimensions and could draw on corpus-linguistic methods to compare ’emunah with semantically adjacent terms across the prophetic corpus.

These limitations do not invalidate the study’s central proposal, but they define its boundaries. The Covenantal Faithfulness-Trust Matrix is offered as a starting point for a research program rather

than as a finished account. Future studies may test it through multi-coder qualitative analysis, empirical investigation of faith formation in specific communities, expanded reception history, and corpus-based lexical comparison. Such work would clarify whether the semantic tension identified here is constitutive of the verse's meaning or an artifact of the analytical framework itself.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to determine the meaning of 'emunah in Habakkuk 2:4 through an integrated Hebrew language analysis and to articulate its relevance for the life of faith. The analysis proceeded through five stages: textual establishment, morphological and syntactic analysis, semantic field reconstruction, reception-historical investigation, and integrative modeling. The findings support a relational reading of the term while resisting the temptation to collapse its semantic tension into a single doctrinal formulation. 'Emunah in this verse functions neither as a purely objective divine attribute nor as a purely subjective human disposition. It operates as a bidirectional covenantal concept in which divine reliability and human steadfastness are mutually constituting. The righteous person lives because God remains faithful, and that faithfulness elicits and sustains the trust by which the righteous endure. The verse's theological weight lies precisely in this reciprocity, and translations or doctrinal formulations that reduce it to one pole risk distorting the prophet's response to the problem of evil.

The study contributes to biblical scholarship in three ways. First, it offers a transparent coding procedure for semantic-theological analysis of contested lexical items, a methodological resource that may be adapted to comparable exegetical problems. Second, it constructs the Covenantal Faithfulness-Trust Matrix, an integrative model that maps 'emunah across two axes: the source of fidelity and the temporal orientation of trust. This matrix is not a synthesis of existing theories but an analytical instrument derived from the text itself, designed to be applied to other occurrences of 'emunah and to other prophetic texts that juxtapose divine promise with human response. Third, it demonstrates that the reception history of Habakkuk 2:4, from the Septuagint through the Qumran Pesher to Pauline and Reformation readings, is not a series of misreadings but evidence of the text's generative semantic potential. The divergence among witnesses is itself theologically significant, and it confirms that the verse's meaning is actualized differently across interpretive communities without being exhausted by any single actualization.

The relevance of these findings for the life of faith is direct. 'Emunah as covenantal faithfulness-trust reframes faith not as intellectual assent or emotional certainty but as a sustained posture of reliance enacted over time. In contexts of suffering, divine silence, and delayed vindication, the verse does not promise the removal of uncertainty. It promises that life is sustained within uncertainty by the reliability of the One who has spoken. This reading resonates with contemporary work on faith and meaning-making in conditions of chronic distress, where spiritual well-being functions as a resource for endurance rather than as an explanation of suffering (Martinez-Calderon et al., 2025). It also aligns with broader hermeneutical discussions that treat meaning as a function of context and use rather than as a fixed lexical property (Andayani et al., 2024; Tali, 2022). The

pastoral implication is that faith communities should resist formulations that equate doubt with unbelief. Habakkuk himself questions, waits, and remains. His ’emunah is not the absence of struggle but the decision to bring struggle before God and to keep standing.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The study depends on published critical editions, lexica, and secondary literature rather than direct manuscript consultation, which means that text-critical judgments are mediated by the editorial decisions of others. It does not employ empirical field data, so claims about contemporary faith formation remain interpretive rather than empirically demonstrated. The coding procedure, while transparent, was executed by a single analyst, and inter-coder reliability was therefore not established. The Covenantal Faithfulness-Trust Matrix is proposed as a heuristic model; its explanatory power across a wider corpus of texts has not yet been tested.

Future research may address these limitations in three directions. First, a mixed-method design could combine the exegetical model with qualitative interviews among faith communities navigating prolonged uncertainty, thereby testing whether the matrix captures lived patterns of covenantal trust. Second, the matrix could be applied systematically to all occurrences of ’emunah in the Hebrew Bible to assess whether the relational reading holds across genres or is specific to prophetic theodicy discourse. Third, comparative work on the Septuagint, Targumic, and Pesher renderings could examine how ancient translators negotiated the same semantic tension identified here. Such work would extend the present study from a single-verse analysis toward a broader account of how faithfulness and trust operate as a unified conceptual structure in biblical and contemporary contexts of faith.

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