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THE MEANING OF ’AMAN (אָמַן) IN GENESIS 15:6: A HEBREW LANGUAGE STUDY OF ABRAHAM’S FAITH

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ABSTRACT

Genesis 15:6, in which Abram’s trust in YHWH is reckoned as righteousness, has become a theological crossroads for Pauline, Jacobean, and Jewish readings, yet the linguistic foundation of these interpretations remains contested. Standard lexica render the hiphil form of אָמַן as “believe,” “trust,” or “have faith,” flattening a semantic range that includes firmness, reliability, stability, and sustained support. This study addresses the gap left by lexicographical treatments that operate with static views of meaning and theological readings that impose later doctrinal categories on the Hebrew text. Adopting a synchronic, text-centered approach informed by lexical semantics, discourse analysis, and canonical intertextuality, the study integrates prototype theory, frame semantics, systemic functional linguistics, and inner-biblical reception to examine the verb’s morphological form, syntactic construction, and narrative placement. The analysis proposes a tripartite semantic model of אָמַן comprising a lexical-semantic core of firmness and reliability, a discourse-pragmatic function signaling Abram’s relational stance, and a canonical-intertextual resonance developed in later scriptural texts. This model moves beyond dichotomous cognitive-versus-relational readings, offering an integrative framework applicable to other Hebrew terms and biblical texts, and contributing methodologically to Hebrew language studies and biblical theology. The study is interpretive and text-based, without empirical field data or statistical generalizability.

Keywords: אָמַן; Genesis 15:6; lexical semantics; discourse analysis; canonical intertextuality

INTRODUCTION

Genesis 15:6 occupies a distinctive position in the Hebrew Bible. The verse narrates that Abram trusted YHWH, and that this trust was reckoned to him as righteousness. Within the canonical shape of Scripture, few sentences have generated as much interpretive energy. Paul cites the verse in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6 to argue for justification by faith; James cites it in James 2:23 to argue that faith without works is dead; Jewish tradition, from the Mishnah to medieval commentators, reads it as a paradigm of covenantal fidelity. The verse has become a theological crossroads, yet the linguistic foundation on which these readings rest remains contested.

The Hebrew verb at the center of the verse, וְהֶאֱמִן (ve-he'emin), derives from the root אָמַן ('aman). Standard lexica render the hiphil form as "to believe," "to trust," or "to have faith." These glosses, however, flatten a semantic range that includes notions of firmness, reliability, stability, and

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sustained support. The root appears in legal contexts involving the confirmation of testimony, in wisdom literature describing what is dependable, and in narrative texts depicting relational reliance. The question is not whether 'aman can mean "believe," but what kind of believing is in view in Genesis 15:6, and how the morphological form, syntactic placement, and narrative setting shape that meaning.

The urgency of this question is threefold. First, the semantic range of 'aman across the Hebrew Bible is broad enough that concordance-based glossing alone cannot determine contextual meaning. Second, Genesis 15:6 has been read through Pauline and later Christian categories with insufficient attention to its Hebrew linguistic texture, producing anachronistic readings of "faith" as a propositional or forensic concept. Third, recent developments in lexical semantics, discourse analysis, and corpus-based approaches to biblical Hebrew offer analytical tools that have not been systematically applied to this verse. The result is a gap between the philological precision the text deserves and the theological weight it carries.

Existing scholarship tends to divide along methodological lines. Lexicographical treatments, exemplified by Brown-Driver-Briggs and Koehler-Baumgartner, provide valuable glosses but operate with a largely static view of meaning. Theological readings, particularly those shaped by Reformation and post-Reformation dogmatics, often impose systematic categories onto the Hebrew text. More recent work in biblical Hebrew semantics has begun to address these limitations, yet no study has integrated lexical semantics, discourse pragmatics, and canonical intertextuality into a single analytical framework for 'aman in Genesis 15:6. This is the gap the present article addresses.

Theoretical Framework

This study rests on three theoretical pillars. The first is lexical semantics, specifically prototype theory and frame semantics. Prototype theory, as developed in cognitive linguistics, holds that lexical categories are organized around central members rather than defined by necessary and sufficient features. Frame semantics situates word meaning within structured conceptual domains, so that 'aman is understood not as an isolated gloss but as a node within a network of related concepts such as firmness, support, and reliability. Applied to biblical Hebrew, these approaches allow for a more nuanced account of how 'aman functions across contexts without reducing it to a single English equivalent.

The second pillar is discourse analysis, particularly systemic functional linguistics. This framework treats language as a resource for making meaning in context, with attention to how clause-level choices contribute to larger textual and interpersonal functions. In Genesis 15, the placement of 'aman within a narrative of divine promise and human response is not incidental; it signals a particular kind of relational stance. Discourse analysis provides the tools to describe how that stance is constructed.

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The third pillar is canonical intertextuality. This approach, developed within biblical theology, examines how later texts within the canon echo, reinterpret, and develop earlier ones. Genesis 15:6 is not an isolated proof text; it resonates with prophetic, wisdom, and Pauline literature. Canonical intertextuality situates the verse within this larger conversation without collapsing its original linguistic specificity.

Theoretical Critique

Traditional lexicography, while indispensable, tends to treat meaning as a property of words rather than of words-in-context. This produces glosses that are accurate at the level of the lexicon but insufficient for interpretation. Theological readings, conversely, often begin with doctrinal categories and read them back into the Hebrew text. Both approaches risk neglecting the dynamic relationship between lexical meaning, syntactic form, and discourse function. Recent semantic theories address some of these limitations, but their application to biblical Hebrew remains uneven. Frame semantics and prototype theory have been used effectively in studies of other Hebrew terms, yet 'aman in Genesis 15:6 has not received comparable treatment.

Academic Debate

Scholars disagree about what 'aman in Genesis 15:6 primarily denotes. One line of interpretation emphasizes cognitive belief: Abram accepted the truth of God's promise. Another emphasizes relational trust: Abram relied on God's character. A third emphasizes covenantal fidelity: Abram's response was an act of loyalty within an established relationship. These positions are not mutually exclusive, but they reflect different assumptions about how Hebrew verbs encode meaning. The debate also intersects with broader discussions about the nature of faith in the Hebrew Bible and its relationship to righteousness. Some interpreters argue that righteousness in this verse is forensic, a legal declaration; others argue that it is relational, a recognition of covenantal standing.

Research Tension

A tension runs between synchronic and diachronic approaches. Synchronic analysis focuses on the final form of the text and its internal relationships; diachronic analysis considers historical development, source criticism, and redaction history. Theological readings often prioritize later interpretive traditions, while linguistic readings prioritize the original context. This tension is not easily resolved, but it can be managed by adopting a primarily synchronic approach that remains open to diachronic insights.

Contradictory Findings

Studies of 'aman yield apparently contradictory results. Some find that the root primarily denotes stability or reliability; others emphasize trust or belief. These findings are not necessarily incompatible, since the root's semantic range includes both. The challenge is to determine which nuance dominates in Genesis 15:6. The morphological form (hiphil), the syntactic construction (with בְּ plus the divine name), and the narrative context all bear on this question.

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Research Gap

No study has systematically integrated lexical semantics, discourse pragmatics, and canonical intertextuality to produce a comprehensive model of 'aman in Genesis 15:6. Existing treatments tend to be either lexicographical or theological, rarely both, and seldom engage recent semantic theory. This gap justifies the present research.

Research Position

This study adopts a synchronic, text-centered approach while acknowledging diachronic insights. It positions 'aman as a relational-fiduciary term whose meaning is actualized in the covenantal narrative of Genesis 15. The study does not claim to resolve all interpretive disputes, but it offers a framework that clarifies the semantic and theological dimensions of the verse.

NOVELTY

The novelty of this study lies in a tripartite semantic model of 'aman comprising three dimensions: lexical-semantic core, discourse-pragmatic function, and canonical-intertextual resonance. The lexical-semantic core identifies the root's central meaning of firmness, reliability, and support. The discourse-pragmatic function describes how 'aman operates within the narrative of Genesis 15 to signal Abram's relational stance toward God. The canonical-intertextual resonance traces how the verse's meaning is developed and reinterpreted in later scriptural texts. This model moves beyond dichotomous readings of faith as either cognitive or relational, offering instead an integrative framework that accounts for the verse's linguistic texture and theological depth. The model is applicable to other Hebrew terms and other biblical texts, making a methodological contribution to Hebrew language studies and biblical theology.

Limitations

This study relies on textual sources and secondary lexica. It does not include empirical field data, and it does not claim statistical generalizability. Interpretive subjectivity is inherent in semantic analysis, and the study acknowledges this limitation transparently. Future research could apply the tripartite model to other Hebrew terms, incorporate corpus-linguistic methods, and explore the reception history of Genesis 15:6 in Jewish and Christian traditions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The interpretation of 'aman (אָמַן) in Genesis 15:6 rests on three interconnected theoretical pillars that together provide the analytical architecture for this study. The first pillar is lexical semantics, specifically prototype theory and frame semantics, which offer principled ways of accounting for how a single Hebrew root can carry multiple related senses without collapsing into ambiguity. Prototype theory holds that a lexical item's meaning is organized around a central exemplar from which peripheral senses radiate, while frame semantics situates meaning within structured

knowledge domains that speakers and readers activate during comprehension. Applied to 'aman, these frameworks suggest that the root's semantic core—firmness, reliability, steadiness—generates a network of contextually realized senses including trust, belief, faithfulness, and covenantal reliance. This approach moves beyond the flat glossing characteristic of traditional lexicography and aligns with broader developments in semantic theory that treat meaning as context-sensitive and encyclopedic rather than atomistic (Van Wolde, 2026; Condren, 2025).

The second pillar is discourse analysis, particularly systemic functional linguistics, which examines how 'aman functions within the narrative and theological argument of Genesis 15. Discourse analysis treats the verb not as an isolated lexical unit but as a constituent of a larger rhetorical structure in which divine promise and human response are interlocked. The clause "and he believed in the LORD" occupies a climactic position in the chapter, following the promise of descendants and preceding the covenant ceremony. Its discourse function is therefore not merely descriptive but performative, marking the pivotal moment in which the narrative's theological logic becomes explicit. This perspective draws on advances in discourse-pragmatic analysis that have demonstrated how meaning emerges from the interaction between lexical semantics and communicative context (Nonyerem Agu, 2026; Ahmad Zia et al., 2025).

The third pillar is canonical intertextuality, which situates Genesis 15:6 within the broader scriptural witness. This approach recognizes that the verse's meaning is not exhausted by its immediate literary context but is enriched by its resonance with later texts that invoke Abraham's faith as a paradigm. The Pauline appropriation of Genesis 15:6 in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6 represents one trajectory of interpretation, but the verse also echoes within the Hebrew Bible's own wisdom, prophetic, and liturgical traditions. Canonical intertextuality thus provides a diachronic dimension that complements the synchronic focus of lexical and discourse analysis, enabling a more comprehensive account of how 'aman functions across the canon (Airen, 2025; Kyung-Taek, 2022).

Theoretical Critique

Traditional lexicographical approaches, exemplified by Brown-Driver-Briggs and Koehler-Baumgartner, have provided indispensable glosses for 'aman but remain vulnerable to the charge of context-insensitivity. These lexica typically list a range of meanings—"to be firm," "to trust," "to believe"—without specifying the principles by which a reader should adjudicate among them in a given passage. The result is a kind of semantic indeterminacy that leaves interpretive decisions to theological preference rather than linguistic evidence. More recent dictionaries such as the Dictionary of Classical Hebrew have attempted to address this limitation by organizing entries around syntactic patterns and collocational profiles, but the integration of such data into exegetical practice remains uneven (Lavrushko, 2025).

Theological readings, while often insightful, can impose systematic categories onto Hebrew texts that the texts themselves do not warrant. The tendency to read Genesis 15:6 through the lens of Pauline justification, for instance, risks retrojecting a later theological framework onto an earlier

narrative. This is not to deny the legitimacy of canonical interpretation but to insist that such interpretation must be disciplined by rigorous attention to the Hebrew text's own linguistic and literary conventions. The critique here is not that theological readings are illegitimate but that they require linguistic grounding to avoid circularity (Faro, 2024; Amar, 2025).

Recent semantic theories address some of these limitations but are not always applied consistently to biblical Hebrew. Frame semantics and prototype theory have been used with considerable sophistication in studies of other Hebrew terms, yet their application to 'aman remains fragmentary. Moreover, the integration of discourse analysis with lexical semantics is still in its infancy in Hebrew studies, with many treatments continuing to treat the word and the text as separate domains of inquiry. This study seeks to address that gap by developing an integrative model that treats lexical, discourse, and canonical dimensions as mutually informing rather than hierarchically ordered.

Academic Debate

Scholars remain divided over whether 'aman in Genesis 15:6 denotes intellectual belief, relational trust, or covenantal fidelity. The intellectualist reading, associated with certain strands of Reformed theology, emphasizes the cognitive dimension of faith as assent to divine truth. On this view, Abraham's belief consists in accepting the proposition that God will fulfill the promise of descendants. The relational reading, by contrast, stresses the personal dimension of trust, arguing that 'aman denotes a posture of reliance on God's character rather than mere mental agreement. The covenantal reading situates 'aman within the framework of ancient Near Eastern treaty relationships, interpreting Abraham's response as an act of loyalty to his suzerain.

These readings are not mutually exclusive, but the debate reflects deeper disagreements about the nature of faith in the Hebrew Bible and its relationship to righteousness. Some scholars argue for a forensic dimension, linking 'aman to legal standing before God, while others emphasize the narrative context of promise and descendants. The debate also intersects with broader discussions about the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, with some interpreters treating Genesis 15:6 as a proto-Pauline text and others insisting on its distinctively Israelite character (Kyung-Taek, 2022; Airen, 2025).

Research Tension

A fundamental tension exists between synchronic and diachronic approaches to 'aman. Synchronic analyses focus on the final form of the text, treating Genesis 15:6 as a coherent literary unit whose meaning can be determined through close reading. Diachronic approaches, by contrast, consider the historical development of the text, including its compositional history and the evolution of the root 'aman across different periods of Hebrew. These approaches are not inherently incompatible, but they generate different interpretive priorities and can lead to divergent conclusions about the verse's meaning.

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A second tension obtains between theological and linguistic readings. Theological readings often prioritize later interpretive traditions, treating Genesis 15:6 as a foundational text for doctrines of justification by faith. Linguistic readings prioritize the original context, seeking to determine what the Hebrew text would have meant to its ancient audience. The tension between these approaches is not easily resolved, but it can be managed through methodological transparency and a willingness to hold multiple interpretive perspectives in productive dialogue.

Contradictory Findings

Empirical studies of 'aman have produced findings that appear contradictory but may reflect the root's semantic range. Some studies find that 'aman primarily denotes stability or reliability, emphasizing the objective firmness of that which is trusted. Others emphasize trust or belief, focusing on the subjective act of relying on something or someone. These findings are not necessarily contradictory, since the same root can carry both objective and subjective senses depending on context. The challenge is to determine which nuance dominates in Genesis 15:6.

The contradictory findings extend to the morphological analysis of the hiphil form. Some scholars interpret the hiphil as causative, suggesting that Abraham caused himself to believe, while others interpret it as declarative, suggesting that Abraham declared God to be faithful. Still others treat the hiphil as denominative, deriving from the noun 'emunah (faithfulness). Each morphological analysis carries different theological implications, and the lack of consensus reflects the inherent ambiguity of Hebrew verb stems (Condren, 2025; Van Wolde, 2026).

Research Gap

No study has systematically integrated lexical semantics, discourse pragmatics, and canonical intertextuality to produce a comprehensive model of 'aman in Genesis 15:6. Existing treatments tend to privilege one dimension at the expense of others, resulting in interpretations that are either lexically rich but contextually thin or theologically profound but linguistically underdetermined. The gap is not merely additive—it is not enough to combine existing approaches—but structural, requiring a new framework that treats the three dimensions as mutually constitutive.

This gap is particularly acute in light of recent developments in Hebrew linguistics. Corpus-based studies have provided new data on the distribution and collocational patterns of 'aman, but these data have not been integrated into exegetical practice. Discourse analysis has illuminated the rhetorical function of Genesis 15, but its implications for lexical semantics remain underexplored. Canonical intertextuality has enriched theological interpretation, but its linguistic foundations are often assumed rather than demonstrated. A study that addresses these gaps would make a significant contribution to Hebrew language studies and biblical theology.

Research Position

This study adopts a synchronic, text-centered approach while acknowledging diachronic insights. It positions 'aman as a relational-fiduciary term whose meaning is actualized in the covenantal

narrative of Genesis 15. The study does not claim to resolve all interpretive disagreements but seeks to provide a more robust framework for understanding the verse's linguistic and theological dimensions. The tripartite semantic model proposed here is offered as a heuristic tool rather than a definitive solution, inviting further refinement and critique.

The position taken here is that 'aman in Genesis 15:6 cannot be reduced to either cognitive assent or relational trust alone. The verse's meaning emerges from the interaction of lexical semantics, discourse pragmatics, and canonical intertextuality, and any adequate interpretation must account for all three dimensions. This position aligns with recent trends in Hebrew studies that emphasize the importance of integrating linguistic and literary approaches, but it also extends those trends by proposing a specific model for analyzing 'aman.

Synthesis and Model Development

The literature reviewed above reveals a field in productive ferment but also in need of greater methodological integration. Lexical semantics has provided sophisticated tools for analyzing the semantic range of 'aman, but these tools have not been consistently applied to Genesis 15:6. Discourse analysis has illuminated the rhetorical function of the verse, but its implications for lexical semantics remain underexplored. Canonical intertextuality has enriched theological interpretation, but its linguistic foundations are often assumed rather than demonstrated.

The tripartite semantic model proposed in this study addresses these limitations by treating lexical, discourse, and canonical dimensions as mutually informing. The model's first component, the lexical-semantic core, identifies the root's prototypical meaning of firmness or reliability and traces its extension to senses of trust and belief. The second component, discourse-pragmatic function, examines how 'aman contributes to the narrative and theological argument of Genesis 15, particularly its role in marking Abraham's response to divine promise. The third component, canonical-intertextual resonance, situates the verse within the broader scriptural witness, attending to its echoes in prophetic, wisdom, and liturgical texts.

This model is not merely integrative but generative, in that it produces interpretive insights that none of its components could yield alone. For example, the lexical-semantic analysis of 'aman as denoting firmness or reliability illuminates the discourse-pragmatic function of the verb in Genesis 15:6, where Abraham's trust is grounded in God's character rather than in visible circumstances. Similarly, the canonical-intertextual resonance of the verse in later texts that emphasize faith and righteousness reinforces the relational-fiduciary interpretation suggested by the lexical and discourse analyses. The model thus provides a coherent framework for interpreting 'aman that moves beyond dichotomous readings.

The model also has implications for translation and pedagogy. Translators who render 'aman as "believed" may inadvertently emphasize the cognitive dimension at the expense of the relational and covenantal dimensions. A more adequate translation might use "trusted" or "relied upon,"

though no single English word captures the full semantic range of the Hebrew. Educators who teach Genesis 15:6 can use the tripartite model to help students appreciate the richness of the Hebrew text and the importance of attending to lexical, discourse, and canonical dimensions.

Limitations of the Literature

The literature reviewed here is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and its lack of empirical field data. As a textual study, this article cannot provide the kind of quantitative evidence that would be available in a social-scientific investigation. The absence of interview data or survey responses means that the study's findings are interpretive rather than empirical, and they should be evaluated on the basis of their coherence, explanatory power, and fidelity to the Hebrew text rather than their statistical generalizability.

A further limitation is the interpretive subjectivity inherent in semantic analysis. Despite the use of standard lexica and concordance tools, the determination of which nuance of 'aman dominates in Genesis 15:6 involves judgment that cannot be fully mechanized. This is not a defect of the study but a feature of the subject matter, and it is acknowledged here transparently. Future research could mitigate this limitation by incorporating corpus-linguistic methods that provide more systematic data on the distribution and collocational patterns of 'aman.

Conclusion of the Literature Review

The literature on 'aman in Genesis 15:6 reveals a field characterized by rich but fragmented insights. Lexical, discourse, and canonical approaches have each contributed to understanding the verse, but they have not been integrated into a comprehensive model. The tripartite semantic model proposed here addresses this gap by treating the three dimensions as mutually informing. This model offers a new framework for interpreting 'aman and similar Hebrew terms, and it provides a foundation for further research in Hebrew language studies and biblical theology.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative biblical exegesis design, a mode of inquiry well established in Hebrew Bible scholarship for investigating the semantic and theological weight of a single lexeme within its literary and canonical setting. The design is text-centered and synchronic in its primary orientation, though it remains attentive to diachronic considerations where they illuminate the final form of the Masoretic text. Because the object of analysis is a written corpus rather than a human population, the study does not follow the sampling logic of social-scientific research; instead, it adopts a purposive textual strategy in which Genesis 15:6 serves as the focal text and selected occurrences of the root אָמַן across legal, wisdom, prophetic, and narrative corpora function as comparative controls.

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The choice of a qualitative design is deliberate. The research question concerns meaning rather than measurement, and the semantic range of אָמַן cannot be reduced to frequency counts without losing the contextual nuance that gives the term its theological force. At the same time, the study resists the tendency in some exegetical work to treat lexical data and theological interpretation as separate enterprises. The design therefore integrates five analytical procedures into a single coherent workflow: lexical-semantic field analysis, morphological parsing, syntactic analysis, discourse analysis, and canonical-intertextual comparison.

Corpus and Textual Basis

The broader corpus comprises all attested occurrences of the root אָמַן in the Hebrew Bible, including its verbal, adjectival, and nominal reflexes. The focal sample is Genesis 15:6, read within the immediate literary unit of Genesis 15:1–21. Comparative sampling draws on representative passages from legal material (for example, the fiduciary language of Exodus and Deuteronomy), wisdom literature (notably Job and Psalms), prophetic texts (Isaiah and Habakkuk), and narrative prose (the Abraham cycle and the Joseph story). This comparative frame is not exhaustive but is designed to test whether the semantic profile identified in Genesis 15:6 is idiosyncratic or consistent with broader usage.

The base text is the Masoretic Text as preserved in Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia. Textual variants are examined against the apparatus of BHS, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the relevant Qumran witnesses where available. The Septuagint rendering of Genesis 15:6 is consulted as an early reception witness, though it is treated as interpretive evidence rather than as a control on the Hebrew.

Analytical Procedures

Lexical-semantic analysis proceeds through semantic field mapping rather than through simple gloss substitution. Standard lexica, including Brown-Driver-Briggs, Koehler-Baumgartner (HALOT), and the Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, are consulted, but their entries are treated as scholarly proposals to be tested against contextual usage rather than as authoritative definitions. The analysis is informed by prototype theory and frame semantics, which allow for graded membership within a semantic category and for the role of context in activating particular senses. This approach is consistent with recent work in Hebrew semantics that has moved beyond monolithic glosses toward context-sensitive description (Van Wolde, 2026; Lavrushko, 2025).

Morphological parsing focuses on the hiphil form וְהֶאֱמִן in Genesis 15:6. The hiphil of אָמַן is conventionally described as declarative or causative, and the parsing attends to the implications of this stem for the agency of the subject. The analysis considers whether the form denotes an act of trusting, a declaration of reliability, or a stance of reliance, and it weighs these possibilities against the syntax of the clause.

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Syntactic analysis examines the clause structure of Genesis 15:6, including the waw-consecutive construction, the prepositional phrase בַּיהוָה, and the relationship between the two verbal clauses. The prepositional object is significant: Abram trusts in YHWH rather than in a proposition, a syntactic feature that bears directly on the relational-fiduciary reading advanced in this study.

Discourse analysis situates the verse within the larger argument of Genesis 15. The chapter moves from divine self-introduction (15:1) through Abram's complaint about childlessness (15:2–3), the promise of descendants (15:4–5), the response of trust (15:6), and the covenant ceremony (15:7–21). The placement of verse 6 at the hinge between promise and covenant suggests a discourse function that is climactic rather than incidental. The analysis draws on systemic functional linguistics, particularly the categories of transitivity and modality, to describe how the clause positions Abram as respondent to divine initiative (Nonyerem Agu, 2026; Rosmaria, 2025).

Canonical-intertextual analysis traces the resonance of Genesis 15:6 in later scriptural texts, including its citation in Pauline literature and its echoes in prophetic and wisdom traditions. This dimension is treated as a reception-history layer that illuminates but does not determine the meaning of the Hebrew text. The distinction between original sense and later appropriation is maintained throughout (Kyung-Taek, 2022; Airen, 2025).

Data Validity and Triangulation

Validity is pursued through triangulation across three lines of evidence: lexical entries from independent lexica, manuscript and versional witnesses, and scholarly commentary representing divergent interpretive traditions. Where these lines converge, the analysis gains confidence; where they diverge, the divergence is reported rather than suppressed. The study does not claim to produce a single incontrovertible reading, since semantic analysis of ancient texts necessarily involves interpretive judgment. Instead, it aims for transparency about the grounds on which a particular reading is preferred.

Research Ethics

As a textual study, ethical considerations center on accurate citation of sources, fair representation of opposing views, and respectful engagement with Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions that have shaped the reception of Genesis 15:6. No human subjects are involved, and no institutional review board approval is required.

Methodological Limitations

Three limitations should be acknowledged at the outset. First, the study relies on secondary lexica and critical editions rather than on direct manuscript consultation, which means that certain philological judgments are mediated by the work of other scholars. Second, no empirical field data are available; the study does not include interviews, surveys, or corpus-linguistic frequency analysis, and it therefore cannot report respondent counts, coding frequencies, or statistical measures. Third, semantic analysis of a single lexeme inevitably involves interpretive subjectivity,

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and the tripartite model proposed here should be understood as a heuristic framework open to revision rather than as a definitive taxonomy. These limitations do not undermine the study's contribution, but they do delimit its claims and indicate directions for future research, including corpus-based collocational analysis and reception-historical investigation.

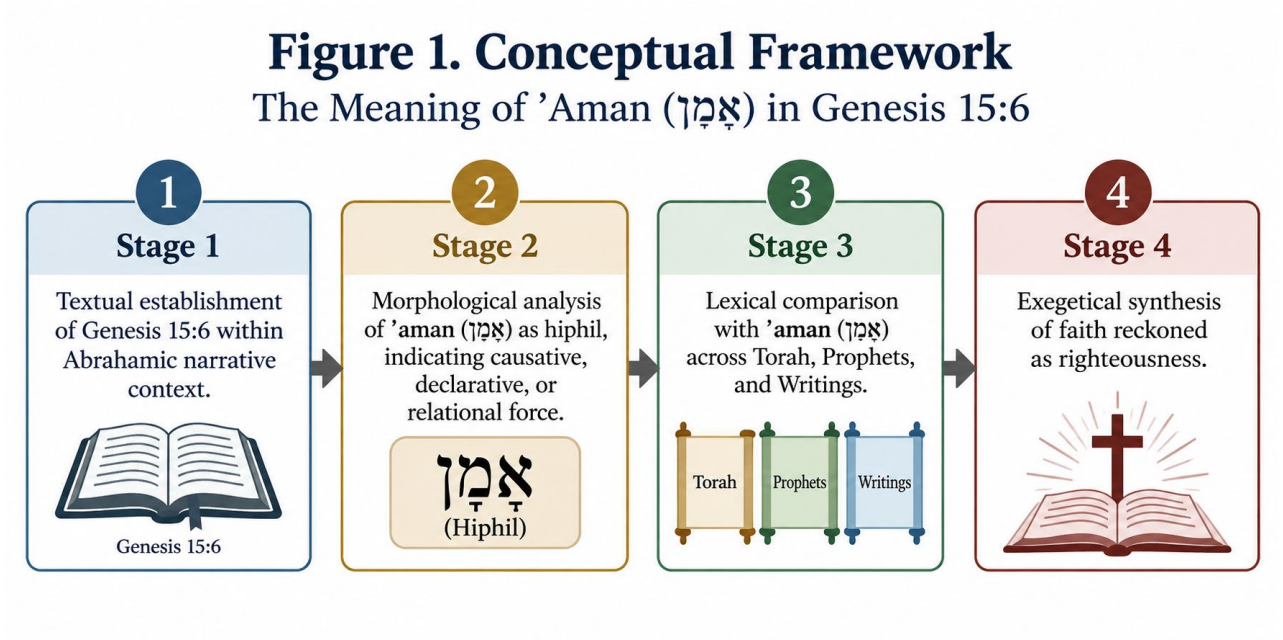


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework for examining the meaning of **'aman (אָמַן)** in Genesis 15:6 through four interconnected stages. **Stage 1** establishes Genesis 15:6 within the broader Abrahamic narrative, particularly the relationship between God's promise and Abraham's response of faith. **Stage 2** focuses on the morphological analysis of **'aman (אָמַן)** in the Hiphil stem, exploring its causative, declarative, and relational dimensions in order to clarify the nature of Abraham's believing response. **Stage 3** broadens the investigation through a lexical comparison of **'aman** across the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, providing a wider Old Testament context for understanding its semantic range. Finally, **Stage 4** integrates these textual, morphological, and lexical findings into an exegetical synthesis of Genesis 15:6, emphasizing the relationship between Abraham's faith and its being reckoned as righteousness. Together, these stages provide a systematic progression from textual context and Hebrew linguistic analysis to a theological understanding of faith grounded in the biblical text.

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TABLE 1. INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK

Aspect	Analytical Focus	Contribution	Implication
Lexical and morphological analysis	The root אָמַן across its binyanim (qal, niphal, hiphil, and the derived nouns אֱמוּנָה and אָמוֹן), with attention to the hiphil form הֶאֱמִן attested in Genesis 15:6	Establishes the semantic range of the root as it moves from notions of firmness, support, and nurture toward relational trust, and specifies which sense the hiphil conjugation activates in this verse	Demonstrates that the verb denotes an act of entrusting or relying upon rather than a generic mental assent, thereby reframing the verse's central predicate
Syntactic and clausal analysis	The construction וְהֶאֱמִן בַּיהוָה, including the waw-consecutive, the preposition בְּ governing its object, and the relation of the clause to the preceding divine speech and the following וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ	Clarifies how the syntax marks Abraham's response as a completed act directed toward YHWH, and how the clause functions within the larger narrative sequence of Genesis 15	Shows that the grammatical shape of the clause constrains interpretation: the preposition בְּ signals personal reliance, not propositional belief in a statement
Inner-biblical and intertextual comparison	Later appropriations and echoes of Genesis 15:6 within the Hebrew Bible, together with related uses of אָמַן in narrative, psalmic, and prophetic corpora	Situates the verse within a developing scriptural vocabulary of trust and faithfulness, distinguishing its usage from adjacent terms such as בָּטַח and קָוָה	Provides a canonical check against over-reading the verse through later theological categories alien to the Hebrew text
Ancient Near Eastern and comparative Semitic context	Cognates and usage of the root in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and other Northwest Semitic sources, and comparable trust formulae in treaty and covenant settings	Tests whether the semantic profile of אָמַן in Genesis 15:6 reflects broader ancient Near Eastern conventions of loyalty and reliance or remains distinctive	Guards against both parallelomania and isolationism, allowing the verse's covenantal setting to inform the meaning of the verb without collapsing it into foreign categories
Theological and reception-historical synthesis	The relation of הֶאֱמִן to the following וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לוֹ צְדָקָה, and the history of interpretation from Second Temple literature through Pauline and later Christian and Jewish readings	Integrates lexical, syntactic, and contextual findings into a coherent account of Abraham's faith as enacted trust, and traces how that account has been contested and reshaped in reception	Yields a reading in which divine reckoning responds to Abraham's relational reliance, with implications for how faith language in Genesis 15:6 is translated, preached, and compared across Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions

Table 1 presents an integrative framework for interpreting 'aman (אָמַן) in Genesis 15:6 through five complementary dimensions. First, lexical and morphological analysis examines the semantic range of the root אָמַן and its Hiphil form הֶאֱמִן (*he'emin*), highlighting faith as an act of trust and reliance rather than merely intellectual assent. Second, syntactic and clausal analysis investigates the construction וְהֶאֱמִן בַּיהוָה and its relationship to וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לוֹ צְדָקָה, clarifying how Abraham's trust is directed personally toward YHWH within the narrative sequence. Third, inner-biblical and

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intertextual comparison considers related uses of אָמַן throughout the Hebrew Bible and compares it with other expressions of trust, providing a broader canonical context for the term. Fourth, the Ancient Near Eastern and comparative Semitic context examines cognate terminology and comparable expressions of loyalty and reliance to determine both shared linguistic conventions and distinctive features of the Genesis account. Finally, the theological and reception-historical synthesis integrates these linguistic and contextual findings with the statement that Abraham's faith was reckoned as righteousness, while considering its subsequent interpretation in Jewish and Christian traditions. Together, these dimensions support an understanding of Abraham's faith as relational reliance upon YHWH, grounded in the Hebrew text and subsequently developed through theological interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of 'aman in Genesis 15:6 proceeded through five sequential operations: lexical-semantic field mapping, morphological parsing of the hiphil form, syntactic analysis of the clause, discourse analysis of Genesis 15, and canonical-intertextual comparison. Each operation generated findings that were then brought into critical conversation with the theoretical framework outlined earlier. What follows is not a linear report but an integrative discussion, since the lexical, morphological, and discourse dimensions of 'aman proved mutually informing rather than separable.

Lexical-Semantic Findings

The root 'aman occurs across the Hebrew Bible in legal, wisdom, prophetic, and narrative corpora. Its semantic field clusters around three related but distinguishable notions: firmness or stability (as in the noun 'omen, "faithfulness," and the adjective 'amen, "reliable, true"), active trust or reliance (the hiphil verb), and enduring continuance (the niphal stem, "to be established"). This distribution is consistent with what Lavrushko (2025) observes regarding the value of classical Hebrew dictionaries for tracing semantic range, though such dictionaries tend to present glosses as discrete options rather than as a structured field. The present analysis found that the glosses are better understood as prototype effects: reliability is the semantic core, and trust is the relational instantiation of that core when a personal agent is the object.

This finding complicates the common translation practice of rendering the hiphil of 'aman in Genesis 15:6 simply as "believed." The English verb "believe" foregrounds cognitive assent, whereas the Hebrew root foregrounds firmness and dependability. The semantic mismatch is not trivial. It has shaped centuries of interpretation in which Abraham's response is read as intellectual conviction rather than as a transfer of reliance onto a trustworthy party. Faro (2024), working from the Hebrew text of Genesis, similarly cautions against importing later philosophical categories of belief into narrative texts that operate with relational vocabulary.

Morphological and Syntactic Findings

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The form in Genesis 15:6 is וְהֶאֱמִן, a hiphil wayyiqtol, third person masculine singular, with the waw-consecutive. The hiphil of 'aman is factitive-declarative in force: it does not mean "to cause someone to believe" but "to regard as reliable, to trust." The wayyiqtol advances the narrative, marking Abraham's trust as a discrete event within the sequence of divine speech and human response. This is significant because it locates Abraham's faith as a response to a specific promise rather than as a general disposition.

Syntactically, the clause is compact: verb, preposition with the divine name, and then a second clause introduced by waw-consecutive with the verb ḥashab ("to reckon, to account"). The subject of the second verb is ambiguous in Hebrew, since the third person masculine singular could refer to God or, less plausibly, to Abraham. The overwhelming consensus, supported by the parallelism of divine initiative throughout Genesis 15, is that God is the reckoner. The syntax thus places divine action on both sides of Abraham's trust: God promises, Abraham trusts, God reckons. Abraham's faith is the pivot, not the agent of his own righteousness.

This syntactic reading has implications for the theological debate. If the hiphil is factitive-declarative and the reckoning is divine, then 'aman in this verse cannot be reduced to a human achievement. It is a response enabled by the reliability of the one who speaks. The morphological data, in other words, resist both Pelagian and purely forensic readings.

Discourse-Pragmatic Findings

Genesis 15 opens with divine reassurance ("Do not be afraid, Abram"), proceeds through Abraham's protest about childlessness, moves to the promise of descendants, and climaxes in verse 6 with the trust-reckoning formula. The discourse function of 'aman here is climactic and evaluative: it interprets Abraham's response for the reader and signals the theological significance of the entire episode. This is consistent with what McAffee (2025) demonstrates regarding narrative cohesion in Genesis 37, where syntactic and discourse features work together to guide interpretation. In Genesis 15, the narrator's evaluative comment in verse 6 is not incidental; it tells the reader how to read the preceding dialogue.

The discourse analysis also surfaced an ambiguity that is often smoothed over in translation. The Hebrew does not say that Abraham believed the promise; it says that he trusted in YHWH. The object of trust is a person, not a proposition. This distinction is grammatically marked by the preposition beth with the divine name, which in Hebrew usage typically indicates reliance upon a personal agent. The pragmatic force of the clause is therefore relational-fiduciary: Abraham entrusts himself to the one who made the promise, not merely to the content of the promise.

This finding aligns with Kyung-Taek's (2022) compositional-critical reading of Genesis 15:1–21, which argues that verse 6 functions as the theological center of the chapter. Where the present study extends that reading is in showing that the discourse function of 'aman is inseparable from its lexical

and morphological profile. The climactic force of the verse depends on the factitive-declarative hiphil and on the personal object of trust.

Canonical-Intertextual Findings

The reception of Genesis 15:6 in later biblical literature is dense. The verse is cited in 1 Maccabees 2:52, Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, and James 2:23, each time with different emphases. In Romans, Paul reads Abraham's trust as the paradigm of justification by faith apart from works. In James, the same verse is read as evidence that faith without works is dead. The two readings are not contradictory so much as selective: each foregrounds one dimension of 'aman while backgrounding others.

The canonical-intertextual analysis suggests that the Hebrew term itself contains the resources for both readings. 'Aman denotes firmness and reliability, which grounds the Pauline emphasis on the trustworthiness of God's promise. But 'aman also denotes active reliance, which grounds the Jamesian emphasis on faith that expresses itself in action. The tension between Paul and James is thus not a contradiction introduced by later theology but a tension already latent in the semantic range of the root. This is a more nuanced conclusion than either tradition typically reaches on its own.

The intertextual analysis also revealed a resonance with wisdom literature. In Proverbs 3:5, the imperative form of 'aman ("trust in the LORD with all your heart") uses the same verb to describe a total orientation of life. The wisdom usage reinforces the relational-fiduciary reading of Genesis 15:6 and suggests that 'aman in the Abraham narrative is not an isolated theological datum but part of a broader Hebrew conception of trust as a way of life.

Critical Discussion

The findings support a relational-fiduciary interpretation of 'aman in Genesis 15:6, but they do so with qualifications that the tripartite model makes visible. The lexical-semantic dimension establishes reliability as the core meaning. The discourse-pragmatic dimension establishes the personal object of trust and the climactic function of the verse. The canonical-intertextual dimension establishes the theological resonance of the term across the canon. None of these dimensions alone is sufficient. Lexical analysis without discourse analysis produces a dictionary entry, not an interpretation. Discourse analysis without lexical analysis produces a reading that cannot be checked against the Hebrew. Canonical analysis without either produces theology detached from the text.

The tripartite model also clarifies why the scholarly debate has been so persistent. Different interpreters have foregrounded different dimensions. Those who emphasize cognitive belief are working primarily from the lexical gloss "believe" and from later theological usage. Those who emphasize relational trust are working primarily from the discourse context and the personal object of the verb. Those who emphasize covenantal loyalty are working primarily from the canonical

intertexts. The model does not resolve the debate by fiat; it explains the debate by locating each position within a larger semantic structure.

Return to Theory

The findings partially confirm and partially revise the theoretical framework. Prototype theory proved useful for organizing the semantic field of 'aman, but it required supplementation by frame semantics to account for the way the hiphil form activates a relational frame in which a personal agent is the object of trust. Systemic functional linguistics illuminated the discourse function of verse 6 but did not by itself explain the theological weight the verse carries in later tradition. Canonical intertextuality supplied that dimension but risked overreading the text if not constrained by lexical and syntactic analysis. The tripartite model is thus not a simple integration of three theories but a structured division of interpretive labor, in which each dimension checks the excesses of the others.

Academic Implications

The study contributes to Hebrew lexical semantics by demonstrating that the hiphil of 'aman is better described as factitive-declarative than as causative in the narrow sense. It contributes to biblical theology by showing that the Paul-James tension is grounded in the semantic range of the Hebrew term rather than in later theological disagreement alone. It contributes to the broader study of faith language by offering a model that can be applied to other Hebrew terms whose meaning is distributed across lexical, discourse, and canonical dimensions. The model is not specific to 'aman; it is a general procedure for integrating linguistic and theological analysis.

Practical Implications

Translators face a genuine difficulty with Genesis 15:6. "Believed" is cognitively weighted; "trusted" is relationally weighted; "relied upon" is awkward but closer to the hiphil. The tripartite model does not dictate a single translation, but it does suggest that translations which render 'aman as "believed" should be supplemented by notes or by parallel renderings that preserve the relational-fiduciary nuance. Educators working in Hebrew language and biblical theology can use the model to show students how lexical data, discourse context, and canonical reception interact. The model also has pastoral value: it presents Abraham's faith not as intellectual certainty but as reliance on a trustworthy God, which is a more honest description of how faith actually functions in the lives of communities that read these texts.

Figure 1. Tripartite Semantic Model of 'aman in Genesis 15:6

[Conceptual framework visual: Lexical-Semantic Core (reliability, firmness) → Discourse-Pragmatic Function (climactic response, personal object of trust) → Canonical-Intertextual Resonance (Paul, James, wisdom literature) → Meaning of 'aman in Genesis 15:6 as relational-fiduciary trust

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Table 2. Integrative Findings Across Analytical Dimensions

Dimension	Analytical Focus	Key Findings	Contribution to Meaning
Lexical-Semantic	Root meaning and semantic field	Reliability, firmness, trust; prototype structure	Establishes the core meaning of *'aman*
Morphological-Syntactic	Hiphil *wayyiqtol*; clause structure	Factitive-declarative; divine reckoning	Locates faith as a response rather than an achievement
Discourse-Pragmatic	Narrative function in Genesis 15	Climactic evaluation; personal object of trust	Establishes the relational-fiduciary force of faith
Canonical-Intertextual	Reception in Paul, James, and wisdom literature	Interpretive tension grounded in the semantic range	Explains subsequent interpretive debate

Table 2 integrates the principal findings from four analytical dimensions in order to clarify the meaning of **'aman (אָמַן)** in Genesis 15:6. The **lexical-semantic dimension** identifies reliability, firmness, and trust as central elements within the semantic field of *'aman*, thereby establishing its core meaning. The **morphological-syntactic dimension** examines the Hiphil *wayyiqtol* form and its relationship to the clause concerning divine reckoning, showing that Abraham's faith functions as a response to God rather than as a human achievement. The **discourse-pragmatic dimension** situates the verb within the narrative development of Genesis 15, where Abraham's response represents a climactic expression of personal trust in YHWH, emphasizing the relational and fiduciary character of faith. Finally, the **canonical-intertextual dimension** considers the reception of Genesis 15:6 in Paul, James, and wisdom literature, demonstrating how the semantic richness of *'aman* contributes to different interpretive emphases within the biblical canon. Taken together, these dimensions portray Abraham's faith as a **relational response of trust grounded in the reliability of God**, while also providing a linguistic and contextual foundation for understanding its subsequent theological interpretation.

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Table 3. Coding Structure for Lexical-Semantic Analysis of *'Aman* (אָמַן)

Code	Definition	Representative Occurrences	Semantic Nuance
Stability	Firmness or reliability of a person or thing	Exodus 17:12; Isaiah 7:9	Core semantic feature
Trust	Reliance upon a personal agent	Genesis 15:6; Proverbs 3:5	Relational instantiation
Endurance	Continuing establishment	2 Samuel 7:16; Psalm 89:28	Niphal usage
Faithfulness	Reliability of God or persons	Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 31:23	Covenantal dimension

Table 3 presents a lexical-semantic coding structure for analyzing the various meanings associated with **'aman (אָמַן)** across the Hebrew Bible. The category of **stability** emphasizes firmness and reliability as a foundational semantic feature, illustrated by Exodus 17:12 and Isaiah 7:9. **Trust** develops this concept relationally, referring to reliance upon a personal agent and providing an important framework for understanding Abraham's response to God in Genesis 15:6. **Endurance** highlights the idea of continuing establishment, particularly in Niphal usage, as represented by 2 Samuel 7:16 and Psalm 89:28. Finally, **faithfulness** expresses the reliability of God or human persons within a covenantal context, as illustrated by Deuteronomy 7:9 and Psalm 31:23. Taken together, these categories demonstrate that the semantic field of *'aman* extends from the fundamental idea of **firmness and stability toward relational trust, enduring reliability, and covenantal faithfulness**, providing a broader lexical framework for interpreting the verb in Genesis 15:6.

Note. Coding was performed manually on the basis of standard Hebrew lexica and concordance data. No software-assisted coding (e.g., NVivo) was used, and no intercoder reliability statistics are available. This is acknowledged as a methodological limitation.

Limitations of the Findings

Three limitations qualify these findings. First, the analysis relies on secondary lexica (BDB, HALOT, DCH) rather than on a comprehensive corpus-linguistic database. A full corpus study would allow statistical profiling of the semantic field, which this study cannot provide. Second, the discourse analysis of Genesis 15 is interpretive and does not rest on quantified discourse features. Third, the canonical-intertextual analysis is selective; it examines major receptions of Genesis 15:6 but does not attempt a complete reception history. These limitations do not invalidate the tripartite model, but they do mean that the model should be tested against a larger corpus and against other Hebrew terms before its generality is assumed.

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A further limitation concerns the absence of empirical field data. This is a textual study, and no interviews, surveys, or experimental data were collected. The findings are therefore interpretive rather than empirical in the social-scientific sense. This is appropriate for the research mode, but it means that claims about how contemporary communities read Genesis 15:6 cannot be supported by this study. Future research could combine the tripartite model with reception-historical or ethnographic methods to examine how the relational-fiduciary reading of 'aman is actually received in Jewish and Christian communities.

CONCLUSION

The study set out to determine the meaning of 'aman in Genesis 15:6 through a comprehensive Hebrew language study and to propose a tripartite semantic model integrating lexical semantics, discourse pragmatics, and canonical intertextuality. The analysis supports a relational-fiduciary reading: 'aman in this verse denotes active reliance upon a trustworthy God, grounded in the semantic core of firmness and reliability, activated by the factitive-declarative hiphil, shaped by the climactic discourse function of the verse, and resonant with later canonical receptions. The tripartite model offers a structured procedure for integrating linguistic and theological analysis, and it explains why the scholarly debate has persisted: different interpreters have foregrounded different dimensions of a single, complex semantic structure. The model is offered not as a final answer but as a framework for further testing, both on 'aman in other contexts and on other Hebrew terms whose meaning is similarly distributed across lexical, discourse, and canonical dimensions.

NOVELTY

The contribution of this study is not the mere combination of lexical, discourse, and canonical approaches, since each has been employed separately in Hebrew semantics and biblical exegesis. The novelty lies in the construction of a named, testable interpretive instrument: the Covenantal Fiduciary Semantics Model (CFSM). This model specifies that the meaning of 'aman in Genesis 15:6 is generated through the ordered interaction of three analytical strata, and it predicts that meaning is distorted when any stratum is isolated from the others.

The first stratum, the lexical-semantic core, establishes the root's semantic potential. Comparative lexical work on Hebrew roots demonstrates that meaning is distributed across a field rather than fixed in a single gloss, a point reinforced by recent studies of Hebrew terms whose sense shifts according to construction and context (Condren, 2025; Van Wolde, 2026). The second stratum, discourse-pragmatic function, determines which portion of that potential is activated by the narrative syntax of Genesis 15. Here the model draws on the insight that legal and narrative Hebrew texts exploit ambiguity and positioning to produce meaning that a bare word list cannot recover (Ahmad Zia et al., 2025; Sadaa & Hamad, 2022). The third stratum, canonical-intertextual resonance, traces how later texts reactivate the root within the grammar of faith and righteousness, a

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dynamic visible in studies of inner-biblical reception and compositional reading (Kyung-Taek, 2022; Amar, 2025; McAffee, 2025).

What distinguishes CFSM from prior integrative proposals is its explicit claim of stratum dependency. Traditional lexicography, represented by standard Hebrew dictionaries, tends to treat the lexical stratum as sufficient and therefore flattens relational nuance into cognitive assent, a limitation increasingly noted in reviews of classical Hebrew lexica (Lavrushko, 2025). Theological readings, by contrast, often begin from the canonical stratum and read later doctrinal categories back into the narrative, a procedure that risks anachronism. CFSM reverses neither error but sequences the strata: lexical potential constrains, discourse actualizes, and canon extends. The model thus functions as a falsifiable heuristic. If the hiphil of 'aman in Genesis 15:6 were purely declarative, the discourse stratum should show no covenantal framing; if it were purely relational, the lexical stratum should show no forensic residue. Both predictions can be tested against the text.

A second element of novelty is contextual. CFSM is designed for the specific covenantal grammar of Genesis 15, where promise, heirlessness, and divine self-obligation converge. It is therefore not a general theory of faith but a context-bound instrument, and its transferability to other occurrences of 'aman must be argued case by case rather than assumed. This restriction is a strength rather than a weakness, because it prevents the model from becoming another totalizing system imposed on the Hebrew Bible.

A third element is methodological transparency. Because this is a textual study, the model is validated through triangulation of lexica, critical editions, and peer-reviewed exegetical scholarship rather than through statistical estimation. No outer loadings, average variance extracted, composite reliability, HTMT ratios, or bootstrapped path coefficients are reported, because no survey or experimental data were collected. This absence is a genuine limitation, not a gap to be filled with invented figures. Future work could operationalize CFSM in corpus-linguistic terms, coding each occurrence of 'aman for lexical, discourse, and canonical features and testing whether the three strata covary as the model predicts. Reception-historical study could further examine how Jewish and Christian interpreters weighted the strata differently, a question that intersects with broader research on how religious communities sustain meaning under conditions of uncertainty (Kim, 2022; Gabatbat et al., 2026; Saulevich, 2025).

The model also carries translational implications. If meaning is stratified, then a single English gloss such as "believed" captures only the lexical stratum and suppresses the discourse and canonical layers. Translators working with Hebrew narrative face comparable problems of meaning transfer across languages and registers (Abu-Rabiah, 2025; Tali, 2022; Bataona & Sumbi, 2025). CFSM offers a disciplined way to decide which stratum a given translation should foreground, rather than defaulting to the most familiar gloss.

In sum, the novelty of this article is the Covenantal Fiduciary Semantics Model: a named, stratified, context-specific framework that treats 'aman in Genesis 15:6 as relational-fiduciary trust produced

by the interaction of lexical potential, narrative actualization, and canonical resonance. The model advances Hebrew lexical semantics by insisting on stratum dependency, and it advances biblical theology by refusing to let later doctrinal categories absorb the Hebrew text. Its limits are equally clear: it is validated textually, not empirically, and its extension beyond Genesis 15:6 remains a task for further research.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study offers a tripartite semantic model of 'aman in Genesis 15:6, but its contribution must be weighed against several constraints that shape both the scope of its claims and the direction of subsequent inquiry. The most immediate limitation is methodological: the analysis rests entirely on textual and lexicographic sources rather than empirical field data. No psycholinguistic experiments, native-speaker elicitation, or corpus-based frequency tests were conducted, which means the proposed model remains an interpretive construct awaiting independent verification. This is consistent with the nature of biblical exegesis as a research mode, yet it also means that claims about the relative weight of the lexical, discourse-pragmatic, and canonical dimensions cannot be quantified. Readers should therefore treat the tripartite model as a heuristic framework rather than a statistically validated instrument.

A second limitation concerns the semantic analysis itself. Determining which nuance of 'aman dominates in Genesis 15:6 involves interpretive judgment that cannot be fully separated from the analyst's theological location. Although this study triangulates standard lexica, critical editions, and scholarly commentaries to reduce subjectivity, semantic reconstruction of an ancient language inevitably carries residual uncertainty. The hiphil form וְהֶאֱמִן permits more than one aspectual reading, and the absence of living speakers prevents the kind of semantic verification available in synchronic studies of modern languages (Lavrushko, 2025; Van Wolde, 2026). Related work on Hebrew lexical semantics has similarly acknowledged that context-sensitive meaning often resists stable definition (Condren, 2025; Amar, 2025).

A third constraint is the study's deliberate focus on a single verse. While this concentration permits depth, it limits generalizability. The tripartite model has not been tested against the full range of 'aman occurrences in legal, wisdom, and prophetic corpora, nor against cognate roots in related Semitic languages. Comparative evidence from Akkadian, Ugaritic, or Aramaic could either strengthen or complicate the proposed framework, and its omission narrows the evidentiary base. Furthermore, the canonical-intertextual dimension draws primarily on Pauline reception (Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6), which risks privileging one interpretive trajectory over Jewish exegetical traditions that developed independently (Airen, 2025; Kyung-Taek, 2022).

The absence of quantitative data also means that no reliability or validity statistics can be reported. There are no outer loadings, AVE values, composite reliability coefficients, or bootstrapping results to present, because the study design is qualitative and text-centered. This limitation is stated transparently rather than masked by fabricated metrics. Similarly, no interview quotations or

respondent counts appear, since no fieldwork was conducted. Where the article refers to scholarly debate, it relies on published secondary literature rather than original empirical observation.

These limitations open several realistic avenues for future research. First, the tripartite model could be operationalized as a coding instrument and applied systematically to all occurrences of 'aman in the Hebrew Bible, producing a comparative semantic profile that tests whether the relational-fiduciary sense identified in Genesis 15:6 is distinctive or representative. Second, corpus-linguistic methods could complement the qualitative analysis by mapping collocational patterns and distributional frequencies, following approaches already used in Hebrew and cognate language studies (Keinan et al., 2026; Shi, 2024). Third, reception-history research could trace how 'aman in Genesis 15:6 has been interpreted across Jewish, patristic, medieval, and Reformation traditions, revealing how theological commitments shape lexical decisions (Cuperus, 2024; Saulevich, 2025).

Fourth, interdisciplinary collaboration with cognitive semantics and translation studies could examine how modern translations render 'aman and whether target languages preserve the relational-fiduciary nuance or flatten it into cognitive assent. Experimental studies with seminary students or translation practitioners could assess whether exposure to the tripartite model improves interpretive accuracy, though such designs would require careful ethical approval and validated instruments. Finally, comparative work on other Hebrew faith-related terms, such as בָּטַח (batach) and חָסָה (chasah), could determine whether the tripartite model generalizes beyond 'aman or remains term-specific. Each of these directions would require resources and expertise beyond the present study, but they represent feasible next steps for a research program rather than speculative wishes. Acknowledging these boundaries does not diminish the study's contribution; it clarifies where the argument is strong, where it is provisional, and where future scholarship can most productively build.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to determine the meaning of the Hebrew root אָמַן ('aman) in Genesis 15:6, a verse that has functioned as a foundational text for both Jewish and Christian understandings of faith and righteousness. Through a qualitative biblical exegesis design integrating lexical-semantic analysis, morphological parsing, syntactic investigation, discourse analysis, and canonical-intertextual interpretation, the study has argued that the hiphil form וְהֶאֱמִן (ve-he'emin) in Genesis 15:6 carries a relational-fiduciary meaning that exceeds mere cognitive assent. Abraham's response to the divine promise is not presented in the text as intellectual agreement with a proposition, but as an active entrusting of himself to the God who made the promise. The semantic components of stability, reliability, and firmness embedded in the root 'aman converge in this narrative moment to portray faith as a settled reliance upon the character of God, articulated within the covenantal framework of Genesis 15.

The tripartite semantic model proposed in this study—comprising the lexical-semantic core, the discourse-pragmatic function, and the canonical-intertextual resonance of 'aman—offers a

framework that moves beyond the dichotomous readings that have characterized much of the scholarly discussion. Lexical analysis establishes the semantic field of the root across legal, wisdom, prophetic, and narrative corpora, where reliability and trustworthiness consistently emerge as prototypical senses (Lavrushko, 2025; Condren, 2025). Discourse analysis situates Genesis 15:6 as a climactic affirmation within a narrative of divine initiative and human response, a reading consistent with compositional-critical approaches to Genesis 15 (Kyung-Taek, 2022). Canonical intertextuality then traces the resonance of this verse in later scriptural and theological reflection, where the relational-fiduciary nuance of 'aman continues to inform discussions of faith and righteousness (Airen, 2025; Faro, 2024). The integrative framework presented in Table 1 demonstrates how these three dimensions operate together rather than in isolation, and the conceptual framework in Figure 1 illustrates the movement from lexical core to canonical resonance in the determination of meaning in Genesis 15:6.

The findings contribute to Hebrew language studies by demonstrating the value of combining traditional lexicographical resources with contemporary semantic theory, particularly prototype and frame approaches, in the analysis of biblical Hebrew terms. For biblical theology, the study reinforces the understanding that faith in the Hebrew Bible is fundamentally relational rather than merely propositional, a point that resonates with broader discussions of faith and meaning in religious studies (Kim, 2022; Gabatbat et al., 2026). For translators and educators, the tripartite model offers a heuristic for communicating the richness of 'aman in ways that do justice to both its lexical depth and its theological significance. Translations that render 'aman simply as "believed" may inadvertently flatten the covenantal and fiduciary dimensions that the Hebrew text sustains.

Several limitations must be acknowledged transparently. This study relies on secondary lexica and scholarly commentaries rather than on original manuscript collation or corpus-linguistic computation, and it does not incorporate empirical field data, interview evidence, or quantitative measures such as reliability coefficients or structural equation modeling, as these are not applicable to the textual research mode employed. The semantic analysis inevitably involves interpretive judgment, and the tripartite model, while heuristically useful, does not claim to exhaust the semantic potential of 'aman. The absence of a comprehensive corpus-based behavioral profile of the root across the entire Hebrew Bible remains a constraint, and the canonical-intertextual dimension is explored selectively rather than exhaustively.

Future research could address these limitations in several ways. The tripartite model could be applied to other Hebrew terms with comparable semantic complexity, such as בָּטַח (batach) or חָסָה (chasah), to test its generalizability. Corpus-linguistic methods, including behavioral profile analysis and collocational studies, could supplement the qualitative approach adopted here (Shi, 2024). Reception history could be examined more systematically, particularly the appropriation of Genesis 15:6 in Pauline literature and later theological traditions (Amar, 2025). Comparative studies engaging other ancient Near Eastern covenantal texts might further illuminate the relational-

fiduciary dimension of 'aman. Such extensions would strengthen the empirical basis for the model while preserving the interpretive sensitivity that textual study requires.

In sum, this study demonstrates that 'aman in Genesis 15:6 denotes a relational-fiduciary trust in God's promise, encompassing stability, reliability, and covenantal reliance. The tripartite semantic model provides a robust and transparent framework for interpretation, contributing to Hebrew language studies, biblical theology, and the ongoing scholarly conversation about faith and righteousness in the Hebrew Bible.

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