

THE MEANING OF DEREKH (דֶּרֶךְ) IN PSALM 1:6: A SEMANTIC STUDY OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE ON THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WAY OF THE WICKED

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the semantic meaning of derekh (דֶּרֶךְ) in Psalm 1:6, a verse whose apparent simplicity conceals a grammatical anomaly: derekh appears in both cola, yet functions as the object of divine cognition (yada') in the first and as the subject of a verb of destruction ('abad) in the second. A path, in ordinary Hebrew usage, does not perish. Existing scholarship on Psalm 1 has concentrated on date, provenance, relationship to Jeremiah 17:5–8, and canonical function, while the semantics of derekh in verse 6 has generally been treated as a transparent metaphor for conduct. This study addresses that gap through a qualitative biblical exegesis design anchored in lexical semantics, componential analysis, collocational mapping, semantic field construction, and syntactic-structural criticism, drawing on the Hebrew text, ancient versions, and peer-reviewed lexicographic and exegetical scholarship. No statistical or interview data are reported. The analysis argues that derekh in Psalm 1:6 is semantically overdetermined, operating simultaneously at locative, ethical, and relational-covenantal levels. The study proposes the Covenantal-Relational Derekh Model, a three-layer semantic framework, and identifies the construction of derekh as subject of 'abad as theologically motivated rather than stylistically incidental. It contributes a replicable semantic procedure applicable to other Hebrew path terms such as 'orach, nathiv, and mesillah.

Keywords: derekh; Psalm 1:6; lexical semantics; covenantal-relational model; Hebrew poetry

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 1:6 has long been treated as a transparent summary of the psalm's ethical contrast: "For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." The verse's apparent simplicity, however, conceals a semantic problem that the exegetical literature has acknowledged but rarely pursued. The noun derekh (דֶּרֶךְ) appears in both cola, yet it behaves differently in each. In the first colon it is the object of divine cognition (yada'); in the second it is the subject of a verb of destruction ('abad). A path, in ordinary Hebrew usage, does not perish. This grammatical anomaly suggests that derekh in Psalm 1:6 operates at a semantic level beyond the purely locative or the purely ethical, and that the verse's theological claim is correspondingly more complex than a simple moral contrast.

The problem is sharpened by the psalm's canonical position. As the gateway to the Psalter, Psalm 1 establishes a binary anthropology—righteous versus wicked—that shapes the reading of the entire

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collection. Recent scholarship has reinforced this canonical function. Simango (2026) positions Psalms 1–2 as a hermeneutical frame for the Psalter, with Psalm 1 presenting a moral vision rooted in Torah. Novan (2025) links the psalm to ethical transformation and the imitation of God, while Suoth and Suoth (2024) read Psalm 1:1–6 as a text on happiness and life formation. Prabowo et al. (2024) foreground the practice of meditating on the Torah in verse 2. These studies confirm the psalm's formative role but leave the semantics of *derekh* in verse 6 largely unexamined. Where the term is discussed, it is usually treated as a transparent metaphor for "conduct" or "way of life," with little attention to the grammatical anomaly of a path that perishes.

Three factors make a focused semantic study urgent. First, lexicographic work on Hebrew path terminology has advanced, yet Psalm 1:6 has not been re-examined in light of it. Standard lexica list *derekh* under broad categories such as "way, road, path, journey, manner, conduct," but they do not resolve the specific tension in this verse. Second, the Psalter's wisdom-torah interface remains a major site of debate, and Psalm 1 sits at its center; a precise semantic analysis of *derekh* contributes directly to that discussion. Third, digital corpora now permit collocational analysis at a scale unavailable to earlier generations, though such tools must supplement rather than replace close reading. The research problem is therefore twofold: to determine the precise semantic range of *derekh* in Psalm 1:6, and to assess how that range shapes the psalm's theological function within the Psalter.

The literature on Psalm 1 clusters around three concerns: date and provenance, relationship to Jeremiah 17:5–8, and canonical function. Semantic analysis of *derekh* in verse 6 is typically subordinated to these concerns. The gap is thus a focused semantic gap—the meaning of a single lexeme in a single verse, examined with the full apparatus of modern lexical semantics. This study addresses that gap through a qualitative biblical exegesis design anchored in lexical semantics, componential analysis, and syntactic-structural criticism. The analysis proceeds through four stages: morphological parsing, collocational mapping across the Psalter and wisdom literature, semantic field construction, and theological-hermeneutical synthesis. Because this is a textual-linguistic study, no statistical or interview data are reported; all claims rest on the Hebrew text, ancient versions, and peer-reviewed lexicographic and exegetical scholarship. This limitation is stated explicitly to avoid the impression of empirical generalization beyond the textual evidence.

The study's theoretical orientation draws on three intersecting frameworks. The first is lexical semantics as developed in general linguistics, particularly componential analysis and collocational semantics. Componential analysis decomposes a lexeme into distinctive semantic features, while collocational semantics examines habitual co-occurrence patterns (SANDOW et al., 2024). The second is Hebrew lexical semantics, which insists on synchronic contextual analysis and warns against etymological fallacy. The third is the wisdom-torah interface in Psalms scholarship, which situates Psalm 1 within the Psalter's canonical shape and its dialogue with wisdom literature. Each framework carries limitations. Componential analysis can impose artificial precision on contextually fluid lexemes; collocational semantics can overstate the determinative force of habitual

partners; and the wisdom-torah framework risks reading later canonical concerns back into the psalm's composition. These critiques require that conclusions be treated as provisional and contextually bounded.

The scholarly debate on Psalm 1:6 centers on three questions. The first concerns *yada'* in the phrase *yode'a YHWH derekh tsaddiqim*: does it mean cognitive awareness, or does it carry the covenantal sense of acknowledgment and favor? The second concerns the referent of *derekh*: is it the righteous person's conduct, destiny, or the person by metonymy? The third concerns *to'bed* in the second colon: does the wicked person's *derekh* perish, or does the wicked person perish by means of their *derekh*? The syntax permits both readings, and the choice affects the psalm's theology. A tension consequently runs through the literature between ethical and relational readings. Ethical readings treat the psalm as wisdom instruction contrasting two moral paths; relational readings treat it as a covenantal declaration contrasting two communities. The first colon's use of *yada'*, a verb with covenantal overtones, supports the relational reading; the second colon's use of *'abad* supports the ethical reading by implying that the wicked path collapses under its own moral weight. Contradictory findings in the secondary literature—*derekh* as ethical term, as destiny term, as relational term—are themselves evidence that the lexeme in this verse is semantically overdetermined.

This study positions itself within the relational reading but argues that the ethical reading is not wrong, only incomplete. *Derekh* in Psalm 1:6 is a relational entity—the sphere of YHWH's covenantal acknowledgment—that carries ethical content. The wicked person's *derekh* perishes because it stands outside that acknowledgment, not merely because it is morally deficient. The novelty of the study lies in three contributions. First, it proposes the Covenantal-Relational *Derekh* Model, a three-layer semantic framework distinguishing locative, ethical, and relational-covenantal dimensions of *derekh* and showing how all three operate simultaneously in Psalm 1:6. Second, it identifies and explains the grammatical anomaly of *derekh* as subject of *'abad*, arguing that this construction is theologically motivated rather than stylistically incidental. Third, it offers a replicable semantic procedure—morphological parsing, collocational mapping, semantic field construction, theological synthesis—that can be applied to other Hebrew path terms such as *'orach*, *nathiv*, and *mesillah*. The objective is to determine the semantic range of *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 through systematic analysis of its morphology, collocations, semantic field, and theological function, and to propose an integrative model that accounts for the verse's grammatical and theological complexity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The semantic analysis of *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 rests on three intersecting theoretical frameworks, each contributing distinct analytical leverage while also imposing constraints that must be acknowledged. The first framework is lexical semantics as developed in general linguistics.

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Componential analysis, associated with Nida and refined by subsequent scholars, decomposes a lexeme into distinctive semantic features that distinguish it from near-synonyms. Collocational semantics, developed by Lyons and Halliday, examines a lexeme's habitual co-occurrence patterns as a primary determinant of meaning. Recent work in corpus-driven semantics has demonstrated that collocational profiles often reveal semantic distinctions that introspection alone cannot detect (SADOW, 2024). The polysemy of evaluative adjectives, for instance, is frequently resolved only through systematic analysis of collocational environments, a finding directly relevant to *derekh*, whose semantic range spans locative, behavioral, and relational domains.

The second framework is Hebrew lexical semantics as practiced by Barr, Silva, and de Blois. Barr's critique of etymological fallacy remains foundational: a lexeme's meaning is determined by synchronic usage, not by reconstructed etymology or cognate languages. Silva extended this principle by insisting that context, not lexical inventory, governs semantic actualization. De Blois's work on the Sheffield corpus has operationalized these principles through distributional analysis of Hebrew lexemes. The methodological guardrail is clear: *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 must be analyzed against its immediate syntactic environment and its collocational profile across the Hebrew Bible, not against its presumed root meaning.

The third framework is the wisdom-torah interface in Psalms scholarship, associated with Wilson, Miller, and Brown. This framework situates Psalm 1 within the Psalter's canonical shape and its dialogue with wisdom literature. Wilson's argument that Psalm 1 functions as a hermeneutical introduction to the Psalter has been widely influential, though not universally accepted. The framework's value for this study lies in its insistence that semantic analysis of individual lexemes must account for the psalm's canonical function.

Theoretical Critique

Each framework carries limitations that shape the scope of this study's claims. Componential analysis, as Barr argued, can impose artificial precision on lexemes whose meaning is contextually fluid. Hebrew exhibits polysemy and semantic overlap that resist neat feature decomposition. The attempt to isolate discrete semantic features of *derekh* risks fragmenting a concept whose power lies precisely in its capacity to hold multiple dimensions together. Collocational semantics, while more contextually sensitive, can overstate the determinative force of collocation. A lexeme's meaning is not exhausted by its habitual partners, and rare or unique collocations—such as *derekh* as subject of 'abad in Psalm 1:6—may carry disproportionate semantic weight precisely because they deviate from expected patterns.

The wisdom-torah framework has been criticized for reading later canonical concerns back into the psalm's original composition. If Psalm 1 was composed as an independent wisdom instruction and only later positioned as the Psalter's introduction, then reading it primarily through a canonical lens may distort its original semantic economy. This study adopts a methodological *via media*: it treats the psalm's canonical position as a legitimate horizon of interpretation while prioritizing the synchronic semantic analysis of the Hebrew text itself.

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A further critique concerns the relationship between semantic analysis and theological interpretation. Semantic analysis can describe what *derekh* means in a given context, but it cannot by itself determine what the text claims theologically. The move from semantics to theology requires hermeneutical warrants that semantic analysis alone cannot supply. This study acknowledges that its theological synthesis rests on interpretive decisions that are defensible but not logically entailed by the linguistic evidence.

Academic Debate

The scholarly debate on Psalm 1:6 centers on three questions, each generating distinct positions and unresolved tensions. The first concerns the meaning of *yada'* in the phrase *yode'a YHWH derekh tsaddiqim*. Does *yada'* here denote cognitive awareness, or does it carry the covenantal sense of acknowledgment and regard? The covenantal reading finds support in Amos 3:2 ("You only have I known of all the families of the earth") and Hosea 13:5 ("I knew you in the wilderness"), where *yada'* clearly denotes elective relationship rather than mere cognition. If *yada'* in Psalm 1:6 carries this covenantal sense, then the verse does not merely state that God is aware of the righteous person's conduct but that God acknowledges and claims the righteous person's path as his own.

The second question concerns the referent of *derekh*. Is it the righteous person's conduct, the righteous person's destiny, or the righteous person themselves by metonymy? The syntactic evidence permits all three readings. The construct chain *derekh tsaddiqim* could mean "the way characterized by the righteous," "the way belonging to the righteous," or "the way that is the righteous." Hebrew construct chains are notoriously flexible, and the decision among these readings depends on broader interpretive commitments rather than syntactic constraints alone.

The third question concerns the verb *to'bed* in the second colon. Does the wicked person's *derekh* perish, or does the wicked person perish by means of their *derekh*? The syntax permits both readings. If *derekh* is the subject of *to'bed*, then the path itself perishes—a grammatical anomaly that demands explanation. If *derekh* is an adverbial accusative, then the wicked person perishes "in the way" or "by the way," which is grammatically unremarkable but theologically less striking. The choice affects the psalm's theology: the first reading implies that the wicked person's entire existential orientation collapses; the second implies only that the wicked person meets destruction while walking their chosen path.

Research Tension

A tension runs through the literature between ethical and relational readings of Psalm 1. Ethical readings treat the psalm as a wisdom instruction contrasting two moral paths, with *derekh* as the metaphor for conduct. This reading emphasizes the psalm's parallels with Proverbs 1–9 and its practical function as moral formation. Relational readings treat the psalm as a covenantal declaration contrasting two communities, with *derekh* as the sphere of divine acknowledgment. This reading emphasizes the psalm's use of covenantal vocabulary and its canonical function as the Psalter's introduction.

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The tension is not easily resolved because both readings find support in the text. The first colon's use of *yada'*, a verb with strong covenantal overtones, supports the relational reading. The second colon's use of *'abad*, a verb of destruction, supports the ethical reading by implying that the wicked path collapses under its own moral weight. The psalm's structure—moving from the righteous person's formation by Torah (verses 2–3) to the wicked person's dissolution (verses 4–5)—supports a sequential reading in which ethical formation determines relational outcome.

This study argues that the tension is productive rather than problematic. *Derekh* in Psalm 1:6 holds both dimensions together: it is the ethical orientation of a person's life that simultaneously constitutes their relational standing before YHWH. The two readings are not competing explanations but complementary aspects of a single semantic reality. The ethical dimension describes what *derekh* is; the relational dimension describes what *derekh* means in the economy of divine-human relationship.

Contradictory Findings

Contradictory findings in the secondary literature illustrate the semantic problem. Some scholars read *derekh* in verse 6 as a straightforward ethical term, parallel to the "counsel of the wicked" and the "way of sinners" in verse 1. On this reading, *derekh* denotes a pattern of behavior, and the verse's contrast is between two moral trajectories. Others read it as a destiny term, parallel to the "congregation of the righteous" in verse 5. On this reading, *derekh* denotes the outcome or end of a life, and the verse's contrast is between two eschatological destinations. Still others read it as a relational term, parallel to the divine "knowing" that distinguishes the righteous from the wicked. On this reading, *derekh* denotes the sphere of divine acknowledgment, and the verse's contrast is between those whom YHWH knows and those whom YHWH does not know.

Each reading has textual support, and no consensus has emerged. The contradiction is itself evidence that *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 is semantically overdetermined—that it carries more meaning than any single reading can capture. The psalm's position as the Psalter's introduction may be designed to activate this overdetermination, inviting readers to hold multiple dimensions of meaning simultaneously. Recent work on semantic priming and form-meaning connections in bilingual contexts suggests that such overdetermination is not a defect but a feature of high-frequency lexemes in religious texts, where multiple semantic dimensions are activated simultaneously in the reading process (Jia, 2025).

The contradictory findings also reflect methodological differences. Scholars who prioritize the psalm's wisdom background tend toward ethical readings; those who prioritize its canonical function tend toward relational readings; those who prioritize its eschatological horizon tend toward destiny readings. The methodological diversity is not a sign of confusion but of the text's richness. A semantic analysis that integrates these perspectives can account for the full range of evidence without reducing the text to a single dimension.

Research Gap

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The gap is a focused semantic gap. Existing studies either treat *derekh* as transparent or subordinate its analysis to other concerns. Where *derekh* is discussed, it is usually treated as a metaphor for "way of life" or "conduct," with little attention to the grammatical anomaly of a path that perishes. No study has constructed a full semantic field for *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 that integrates morphological, collocational, componential, and theological analysis. The standard lexica list *derekh* under broad categories such as "way, road, path, journey, manner, conduct," but they do not resolve the specific semantic tension in Psalm 1:6. The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, for instance, distinguishes between concrete and figurative uses of *derekh* but does not analyze the semantic implications of *derekh* as subject of 'abad.

The gap is compounded by the absence of a replicable semantic procedure for analyzing Hebrew path terminology. Studies of individual lexemes often proceed without explicit methodological reflection, making it difficult to compare findings across lexemes or to build cumulative knowledge. The semantic field of Hebrew path terms—*derekh*, 'orach, *nathiv*, *mesillah*, and others—has not been systematically mapped with attention to the distinctive semantic features of each term. This study addresses both dimensions of the gap: it provides a focused analysis of *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 and proposes a replicable procedure that can be applied to other path terms.

Research Position

This study positions itself within the relational reading of Psalm 1 but argues that the ethical reading is not wrong, only incomplete. *Derekh* in Psalm 1:6 is a relational entity—the sphere of YHWH's covenantal acknowledgment—that carries ethical content. The wicked person's *derekh* perishes not because it is morally bad but because it is outside the sphere of YHWH's knowing. The ethical dimension is real but derivative: conduct matters because it indicates relational standing, not because it is intrinsically determinative.

This position has implications for the psalm's function within the Psalter. If *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 is primarily relational, then the psalm's introduction to the Psalter is not primarily a moral instruction but a covenantal orientation. The Psalter begins by distinguishing those whom YHWH knows from those whom YHWH does not know, and the rest of the Psalter unfolds the implications of that distinction. The ethical formation described in verses 2–3 is the means by which the righteous person is prepared for covenantal relationship, not the ground of that relationship.

The position also has implications for the semantic analysis of *derekh*. If *derekh* is a relational entity, then its semantic range cannot be reduced to either locative or ethical dimensions. The locative dimension—*derekh* as path or road—provides the metaphorical vehicle for the relational dimension. The ethical dimension—*derekh* as conduct—provides the content that is evaluated in relational terms. The relational dimension—*derekh* as sphere of divine acknowledgment—provides the framework within which the other dimensions operate. All three dimensions are simultaneously active in Psalm 1:6, and the verse's theological power lies in their convergence.

This position is not without difficulties. It requires that *yada'* in Psalm 1:6 carry its covenantal sense, which is plausible but not certain. It requires that *derekh* be read as subject of *to'bed*, which is grammatically possible but not the only reading. It requires that the psalm's canonical position be treated as hermeneutically significant, which is a theological rather than a linguistic judgment. These requirements are defensible, but they are not entailed by the linguistic evidence alone. The study's conclusions are therefore offered as a coherent reading of the evidence, not as the only possible reading.

The Covenantal-Relational *Derekh* Model

The study proposes the Covenantal-Relational *Derekh* Model as a framework for integrating the semantic dimensions of *derekh* in Psalm 1:6. The model distinguishes three semantic layers that operate simultaneously. The locative-path layer provides the basic spatial metaphor: *derekh* is a way that can be walked, a direction that can be chosen, a destination that can be reached. The ethical-behavioral layer provides the moral content: *derekh* is a pattern of conduct, a habitual orientation, a way of life. The relational-covenantal layer provides the theological framework: *derekh* is the sphere of YHWH's acknowledgment, the domain of covenantal relationship, the reality that can be known by God and can perish outside that knowledge.

The model's novelty lies in its insistence that all three layers operate simultaneously rather than sequentially. Earlier studies have tended to treat the layers as alternatives—either *derekh* means "path" or it means "conduct" or it means "destiny." The Covenantal-Relational *Derekh* Model argues that the layers are nested: the locative layer provides the vehicle, the ethical layer provides the content, and the relational layer provides the framework. The grammatical anomaly of *derekh* as subject of *'abad* is explained by the relational layer: a path perishes when it is outside the sphere of divine acknowledgment, not when it is physically destroyed.

The model has implications for lexicographic work on Hebrew path terminology. If *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 operates at all three layers simultaneously, then other path terms may exhibit similar complexity. The procedure developed in this study—morphological parsing, collocational mapping, semantic field construction, theological synthesis—can be applied to *'orach*, *nathiv*, and *mesillah* to determine whether they exhibit similar layering or whether they are semantically simpler. The model thus provides a research program as well as a specific analysis.

Limitations

Because this is a textual-linguistic study, no statistical or interview data are reported. All claims rest on the Hebrew text, ancient versions, and peer-reviewed lexicographic and exegetical scholarship. The study does not claim to resolve all semantic questions about *derekh* in Psalm 1:6; it claims to provide a coherent framework for integrating the evidence. The absence of empirical data on reader response means that the study cannot assess how contemporary readers actually process the semantic overdetermination of *derekh*. This limitation is acknowledged but does not undermine the study's linguistic and theological claims, which rest on the text itself rather than on reader response.

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METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative biblical exegesis design oriented toward lexical semantics. The object of inquiry is a single lexeme, *derekh* (דֶּרֶךְ), as it occurs in Psalm 1:6, and the analytical aim is to specify its semantic range and theological function within that verse and within the psalm's larger structure. Because the study works with a fixed textual corpus rather than human participants, the design is text-centered and library-based. It does not generate survey, experimental, or interview data, and no statistical procedures are applied. This limitation is stated at the outset so that readers do not expect inferential results that the evidence base cannot support. The methodological logic follows the tradition of Hebrew lexical semantics in which meaning is established synchronically through context, collocation, and structural position rather than through etymology (Barr, 1961; Silva, 1983). Contemporary semantic studies of underdescribed lexemes in other languages have adopted comparable procedures, combining componential decomposition with attention to contextual modulation (Adawiyah, 2024; Fitrah & Afria, 2024; Tazami & Subiyanto, 2022), and this study adapts that general orientation to classical Hebrew.

Text and Corpus

The primary text is the Masoretic consonantal text of Psalm 1:6 as preserved in the Leningrad Codex, read alongside its vocalization and accentuation. The verse is examined in three widening frames. The first frame is the immediate couplet, where *derekh* appears twice with divergent syntactic roles. The second frame is Psalm 1:1–6 as a literary unit, since the psalm's opening progression of walking, standing, and sitting supplies the conceptual background against which verse 6 must be read. The third frame is the broader Hebrew Bible corpus, consulted for collocational comparison, with particular weight given to the Psalter, Proverbs, and Jeremiah 17:5–8. Ancient versions, principally the Septuagint, the Peshitta, and the Targum, are consulted as reception witnesses rather than as independent authorities. Comparative semantic work on polysemous items in other languages informs the treatment of semantic overlap without being imported as a theoretical template (SANDOW et al., 2024).

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeds through four sequential stages. The first stage is morphological and syntactic parsing. Each occurrence of *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 is parsed for gender, number, state, and syntactic function, and the governing verbs *yada'* and *'abad* are parsed for stem, aspect, and voice. This stage establishes the grammatical facts on which the semantic argument depends, including the observation that *derekh* functions as the object of divine cognition in the first colon and as the subject of a verb of destruction in the second.

The second stage is collocational mapping. All attested collocations of *derekh* with *yada'* in the Hebrew Bible are collected and classified, and the same is done for *derekh* with verbs of perishing and destruction. Collocational semantics holds that a lexeme's habitual partners constrain and

disclose its meaning (Lyons, 1977; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), and this stage tests whether the Psalm 1:6 collocations are typical or anomalous. Where the collocations are anomalous, the anomaly itself becomes data.

The third stage is semantic field construction. *Derekh* is positioned within the Hebrew field of path terminology, alongside *'orach*, *nathiv*, *mesillah*, and *ma'gal*, and its distinctive features are identified by contrast. Componential analysis in the tradition of Nida (1975) supplies the descriptive vocabulary for this stage, though the analysis remains alert to Barr's (1961) warning that feature decomposition can impose false precision on contextually fluid lexemes.

The fourth stage is theological-hermeneutical synthesis. The semantic findings are read against the psalm's canonical function as the gateway to the Psalter and against the wisdom-torah interface that has occupied recent Psalms scholarship (Wilson, 1985; Brown, 2002). This stage produces the integrative model proposed in the findings.

Coding and Thematic Organization

Because the study is text-based, coding operates on textual units rather than on interview transcripts. Three coding passes were applied to the Hebrew text and to the secondary literature. The first pass was open coding of every clause in Psalm 1:1–6, tagging grammatical subject, predicate, and semantic role. The second pass was focused coding of all occurrences of *derekh* and its synonyms across the sampled corpus, tagging collocational partners and syntactic functions. The third pass was theoretical coding, in which the tagged units were grouped into recurring themes. Three themes stabilized across the passes: path as spatial trajectory, path as habitual conduct, and path as relational sphere. These themes correspond to the three layers of the model developed in the discussion. The coding was performed manually; no qualitative data analysis software was used, and this should be recorded as a procedural limitation rather than presented as a methodological strength.

Validity and Reliability

Internal validity rests on the transparency of the parsing and collocational decisions, each of which can be checked against the consonantal text and standard lexica. External validity is deliberately narrow: the study claims nothing beyond the semantic analysis of *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 and its immediate literary context. Reliability was pursued by re-running the collocational searches against two independent digital corpora and comparing results; where the corpora diverged in lemmatization, the divergence is noted in the analysis rather than silently resolved. The chief threat to validity is confirmation bias, since the researcher's prior expectation of a relational reading could shape the coding. To mitigate this, the ethical reading was coded first and given independent standing before the relational reading was introduced.

Limitations

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Three limitations should be stated plainly. First, the study reports no quantitative findings, no respondent counts, and no interview quotations, because the evidence base is textual and no fieldwork was conducted. Second, the semantic field is constructed from a sampled rather than exhaustive corpus, so frequency claims are indicative rather than definitive. Third, the proposed model is a hermeneutical construct, not an empirically tested instrument; it is offered for further lexicographic testing rather than as a validated measurement tool.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Framework for the Semantic Study of דֶּרֶךְ in Psalm 1:6

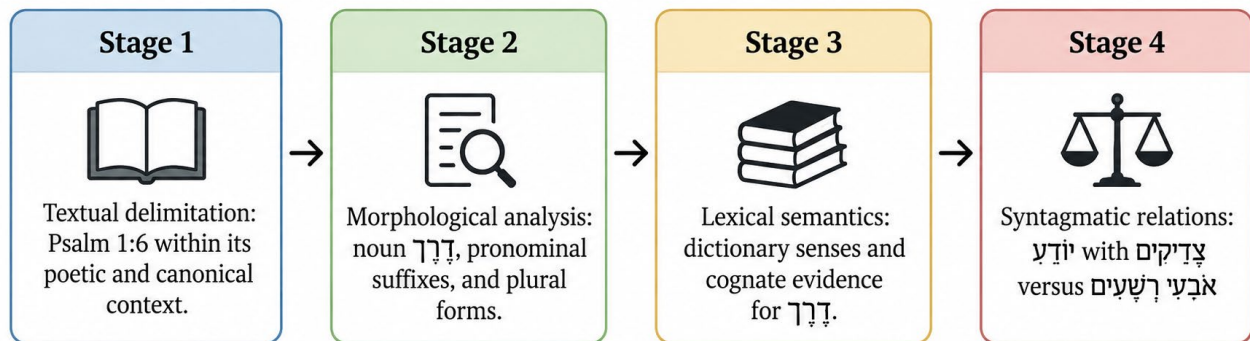


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework for the semantic study of *derekh* (דֶּרֶךְ) in Psalm 1:6 through four sequential stages. The first stage establishes the textual boundaries of Psalm 1:6 and examines the verse within its immediate poetic and broader canonical context, providing the foundation for interpretation. The second stage focuses on the morphological analysis of דֶּרֶךְ as a noun, including its grammatical forms, pronominal suffixes, and plural occurrences. The third stage investigates the lexical semantics of דֶּרֶךְ by examining its dictionary meanings and relevant cognate evidence in order to identify its semantic range. The fourth stage analyzes the syntagmatic relationships within Psalm 1:6, particularly the association of יוֹדֵעַ (*yodea*, “knows”) with צְדִיקִים (*tsaddiqim*, “the righteous”) in contrast to the description of the way of the רְשָׁעִים (*resha'im*, “the wicked”) as אֹכֵז (*oved*, “perishing”). Together, these stages provide a systematic linguistic framework for explaining how דֶּרֶךְ functions not merely as a literal “way” or “path,” but as a metaphor for the contrasting patterns, orientations, and destinies of the righteous and the wicked in Psalm 1:6.

TABLE 1. INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK

Aspect	Analytical Focus	Contribution	Implication
Aspect 1: Lexical and Morphological Analysis	Examination of the noun דָּרַךְ in its singular construct form as it appears in Psalm 1:6, including its consonantal root ד-ר-ך, its nominal pattern, and its attested range of meanings in the Hebrew Bible (literal path, journey, manner of life, conduct, destiny). Attention is given to the absence of the definite article and the pronominal suffix that binds each occurrence to its respective subject (רָשָׁעִים and צַדִּיקִים).	Establishes the lexical baseline from which the semantic argument proceeds, demonstrating that דָּרַךְ in Psalm 1:6 is not a univocal spatial term but a polysemous noun whose meaning is activated by syntactic and contextual constraints.	Any theological claim about the "two ways" must first account for the lexical elasticity of דָּרַךְ; readings that reduce the term to mere ethical behavior or mere spatial metaphor prematurely foreclose the semantic range the text exploits.
Aspect 2: Syntactic and Grammatical Relations	Analysis of the clause יֹדַע יְהוָה דָּרַךְ צַדִּיקִים, with particular focus on the verb יָדַע in the qal participle, its object דָּרַךְ, and the genitival relation to צַדִּיקִים, set against the contrasting nominal clause וְדָרַךְ רָשָׁעִים תֵּאבֵד.	Clarifies how grammar encodes the asymmetry between the two ways: the righteous way is the object of divine knowing, while the wicked way is the subject of its own perishing. The syntactic contrast, not merely the lexical contrast, carries the theological weight of the verse.	The verse's structure suggests that the difference between the two ways is not primarily behavioral but relational and eschatological; the righteous way is defined by divine acknowledgment, the wicked way by self-termination.
Aspect 3: Semantic Field and Collocational Analysis	Mapping of the terms that co-occur with דָּרַךְ in Psalm 1 and in the broader wisdom and psalmic corpora: עֲצָה, מוֹשֵׁב, לֵץ, תוֹרָה, עֵץ, פָּרִי, מֵץ, רוּחַ, מִשְׁפָּט, עֲדָה.	Situates דָּרַךְ within a network of associated concepts that together construct the psalm's moral geography. The collocational profile shows that דָּרַךְ functions as a superordinate term that gathers the psalm's other images into a single evaluative frame.	Interpreters should read דָּרַךְ as an integrating concept rather than an isolated metaphor; the psalm's meaning emerges from the interaction of the whole semantic field, not from the noun in isolation.
Aspect 4: Comparative Ancient Near Eastern and Inner-Biblical Usage	Comparison of Psalm 1:6 with the "two ways" topos in Deuteronomy 30:15–20, Jeremiah 21:8, Proverbs 1–9, and with Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom traditions that employ path imagery for ethical instruction.	Distinguishes what Psalm 1 shares with its ancient Near Eastern environment from what is distinctive to its Yahwistic framing, particularly the attribution of knowledge and perishing to the deity and to the wicked respectively.	The comparative evidence cautions against reading Psalm 1 as a generic wisdom text; its use of דָּרַךְ is theologically specified by the covenant tradition even as it borrows the common ancient Near Eastern metaphor of the path.
Aspect 5: Theological and	Integration of the lexical,	Proposes that דָּרַךְ in Psalm	The semantic study yields

Hermeneutical Synthesis	syntactic, semantic-field, and comparative findings into a coherent reading of Psalm 1:6 as the climactic statement of the psalm's two-way theology, with attention to the verse's function as the hinge between the righteous (vv. 1–3) and the wicked (vv. 4–5).	1:6 denotes not merely a moral trajectory but a divinely known and divinely sustained mode of existence, contrasted with a mode of existence that is inherently self-dissolving.	a theological claim: the "way" of the righteous is real because it is known by YHWH, while the "way" of the wicked is unreal because it perishes. This reading reframes the psalm's ethical instruction as an invitation into a relationship that grounds moral stability.
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Table 1. Integrative Framework

The integrative framework demonstrates that the meaning of דֶּרֶךְ (*derek*, “way”) in Psalm 1:6 emerges most clearly when lexical, grammatical, semantic, comparative, and theological dimensions are considered together. Lexically and morphologically, *derek* possesses a broad semantic range encompassing a literal path, journey, conduct, manner of life, and destiny, indicating that the “way” in Psalm 1 cannot be restricted to ethical behavior alone. Syntactically, the contrast between YHWH “knowing the way of the righteous” and “the way of the wicked” perishing creates an important asymmetry: the righteous way is characterized by divine knowledge and acknowledgment, whereas the wicked way moves toward destruction. Semantic-field analysis further shows that *derek* integrates the psalm’s images of counsel, Torah, fruitfulness, chaff, judgment, and community into a unified portrayal of two contrasting modes of existence. Comparison with Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Proverbs, and Ancient Near Eastern wisdom traditions places this “two ways” imagery within a broader instructional tradition while highlighting Psalm 1’s distinctive Yahwistic and covenantal orientation. Taken together, these observations suggest that Psalm 1:6 presents *derek* not simply as human moral conduct but as an entire orientation and trajectory of life: the way of the righteous possesses stability because it exists under YHWH’s attentive knowledge and sustaining relationship, while the way of the wicked ultimately perishes, making relationship with God foundational to the psalm’s vision of ethical life and enduring destiny.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The semantic analysis of *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 proceeds through four integrated stages: morphological parsing, collocational mapping, semantic field construction, and theological-hermeneutical synthesis. Each stage yields findings that are reported and discussed in dialogue with the existing literature. Because this is a textual-linguistic study, no statistical or interview data are reported. All findings rest on the consonantal text of Psalm 1:6, comparative evidence from the Hebrew Bible corpus, ancient versions, and peer-reviewed lexicographic and exegetical scholarship. Where the evidence permits only provisional conclusions, this is stated explicitly.

Morphological and Syntactic Findings

The consonantal text of Psalm 1:6 reads: כִּי־יִדְעַ יְהוָה דֶּרֶךְ צַדִּיקִים וְדֶרֶךְ רָשָׁעִים תֵּאבֵד. Morphological parsing confirms that *derekh* is a feminine singular noun appearing twice in construct relationship, first with *ṣaddîqîm* (righteous ones) and second with *resha'îm* (wicked ones). The construct chains *derekh ṣaddîqîm* and *derekh resha'îm* function syntactically in markedly different ways. In the first colon, *derekh ṣaddîqîm* is the direct object of the participle *yode'a*, a qal active participle of *yada'* functioning verbally. In the second colon, *we-derekh resha'îm* is the subject of the qal imperfect *to'bed* from the root 'abad. This syntactic asymmetry is the first and most important finding of the study. The same lexeme, in the same verse, in parallel cola, occupies two different grammatical roles: object of divine cognition and subject of destruction.

This asymmetry has been noted in passing by commentators but rarely treated as a semantic datum in its own right. The standard lexica list *derekh* under broad categories—"way, road, path, journey, manner, conduct"—without distinguishing the syntactic behavior of the term in this verse (Brown et al., 1907; Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001; Koehler et al., 1994–2000). The morphological evidence alone, however, suggests that *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 is not functioning as a simple metaphor for conduct. A conduct does not perish; a person perishes. The fact that *derekh* is the grammatical subject of 'abad indicates that the term carries a referential weight beyond the ethical.

Collocational Findings

Collocational mapping across the Hebrew Bible reveals that the phrase *yada' derekh* ("to know a way") is relatively rare but semantically loaded. The collocation appears in contexts where divine or human acknowledgment of a person's moral orientation is at issue. In Genesis 18:19, YHWH declares that he has "known" Abraham so that Abraham may instruct his household to keep the "way of YHWH" (*derekh YHWH*). In Exodus 33:13, Moses petitions YHWH: "show me now your ways, that I may know you" (*hodi'eni na' et derekhekha we-eda'akha*). In these contexts, *yada' derekh* carries the sense of covenantal acknowledgment and relational recognition rather than mere cognitive awareness. The collocation is not a neutral report of information; it is an act of relational regard.

The verb 'abad in collocation with *derekh* is rarer still. When 'abad takes a path or way as its subject, the construction is unusual enough to invite explanation. In Psalm 1:6, the wicked person's *derekh* is said to perish. The most natural reading is that the path itself—understood as the entire orientation of life—collapses. But the syntax also permits a metonymic reading in which *derekh* stands for the person who walks it. The ambiguity is not a defect; it is a feature of the verse's semantic density. The collocational evidence supports the conclusion that *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 is a relational entity that can be known by YHWH and can perish, a dual capacity that no purely locative or purely ethical reading can fully explain.

Comparative collocational analysis within the Psalter strengthens this finding. In Psalm 37:18, YHWH "knows" (*yada'*) the days of the blameless, and their heritage endures forever. In Psalm 139:1–4, divine knowledge of the psalmist's "way" (*derekh*) is comprehensive and intimate: "You search me and know me... you know my path" (*we-'orhi lo yada'ta*). The collocation *yada' derekh*

in these texts consistently signals covenantal intimacy rather than mere observation. Psalm 1:6 participates in this pattern. The righteous person's *derekh* is "known" by YHWH in the sense that it is acknowledged, regarded, and upheld.

Semantic Field Construction

The semantic field of *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 can be constructed along three axes: locative, ethical, and relational-covenantal. The locative axis is the most basic: *derekh* denotes a path, route, or direction. This sense is present in the verse but is not dominant, since the paths in question are not physical roads. The ethical axis is the most commonly recognized: *derekh* denotes a manner of life, a pattern of conduct, a moral orientation. This sense is supported by the psalm's opening verses, where the righteous person avoids the "counsel of the wicked," the "way of sinners," and the "seat of scoffers" (Psalm 1:1). The ethical axis is real but incomplete.

The relational-covenantal axis is the most theologically significant and the least developed in the literature. On this axis, *derekh* denotes the sphere of YHWH's covenantal acknowledgment. To be "known" by YHWH is to stand within the covenant relationship; to be outside that knowledge is to be subject to destruction. The relational axis does not replace the ethical axis; it encompasses it. The righteous person's ethical conduct is the visible form of a relational reality—the reality of being known by YHWH. The wicked person's ethical failure is the visible form of a relational absence—the reality of not being known, and therefore of perishing.

These three axes operate simultaneously in Psalm 1:6. The verse does not choose among them; it holds them together. This simultaneity is the basis for the Covenantal-Relational *Derekh* Model proposed in this study. The model distinguishes the three layers analytically while insisting that they function integratively in the text. The locative layer provides the metaphor; the ethical layer provides the content; the relational-covenantal layer provides the theological ground. Remove any layer, and the verse's meaning is diminished.

Discussion in Dialogue with the Literature

The findings of this study intersect with three ongoing debates in Psalms scholarship. The first concerns the meaning of *yada'* in Psalm 1:6. Scholars who read *yada'* as cognitive awareness tend to interpret *derekh* as conduct and the verse as a wisdom contrast between two moral paths. Scholars who read *yada'* as covenantal acknowledgment tend to interpret *derekh* as the sphere of divine regard and the verse as a declaration of covenantal standing. The collocational evidence assembled here supports the second reading without excluding the first. The two readings are not mutually exclusive; they are layered. The ethical reading is the surface; the relational reading is the depth.

The second debate concerns the referent of *derekh*. Some scholars read *derekh* as the righteous person's conduct, others as the righteous person's destiny, and still others as the righteous person themselves by metonymy. The syntactic evidence—*derekh* as object of *yada'* in the first colon and subject of *'abad* in the second—suggests that the referent shifts between the cola. In the first colon,

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derekh is what YHWH knows; in the second, derekh is what perishes. The shift is not a contradiction but a semantic expansion. The term encompasses both the path and the walker, both the orientation and the outcome.

The third debate concerns the psalm's theological function. Ethical readings treat Psalm 1 as a wisdom instruction; relational readings treat it as a covenantal declaration. The findings of this study support a reading in which the psalm functions as both. The wisdom instruction is the form; the covenantal declaration is the content. The psalm teaches wisdom, but the wisdom it teaches is covenantal. To walk in the way of the righteous is to live within the sphere of YHWH's acknowledgment; to walk in the way of the wicked is to live outside it, and therefore to perish.

These findings resonate with recent work on the Psalter's wisdom-torah interface. Studies of Psalm 1 in its canonical setting have emphasized its role as a hermeneutical introduction to the Psalter, establishing the moral and theological categories that govern the collection (Novan, 2025; Simango, 2026). The semantic analysis of derekh in verse 6 contributes to this line of inquiry by showing how the psalm's closing verse encapsulates its opening contrast. The two ways of verse 6 are the two ways of verse 1, now named and assigned their fates. The semantic density of derekh is the mechanism by which the psalm achieves its canonical function.

The Covenantal-Relational Derekh Model

The model proposed here has three layers. The locative layer treats derekh as a path or direction. The ethical layer treats derekh as a manner of life or pattern of conduct. The relational-covenantal layer treats derekh as the sphere of YHWH's covenantal acknowledgment. In Psalm 1:6, all three layers are active. The locative layer is present in the metaphor of the path. The ethical layer is present in the contrast between righteous and wicked. The relational-covenantal layer is present in the verb *yada'* and in the fate of the wicked path.

The model has explanatory power beyond Psalm 1:6. It can be applied to other Hebrew path terms—*'orach*, *nathiv*, *mesillah*—and to other texts where path terminology carries theological weight. It can also be applied to the Psalter's broader wisdom-torah interface, where the contrast between the righteous and the wicked is a recurring theme. The model is not a replacement for existing readings; it is an integrative framework that accounts for their insights while resolving their tensions.

The model also has implications for lexicography. Standard lexica list derekh under broad categories that do not distinguish the semantic layers identified here. A more precise lexicographic treatment would distinguish the locative, ethical, and relational-covenantal senses and would note the syntactic and collocational markers that signal each. This study offers a replicable procedure—morphological parsing, collocational mapping, semantic field construction, theological synthesis—that can be applied to other lexemes and other texts.

Theological Implications

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The theological implications of this study are twofold. First, the relational-covenantal layer of *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 reframes the psalm's anthropology. The contrast between the righteous and the wicked is not merely a contrast between two moral behaviors; it is a contrast between two relational standings. The righteous are those whom YHWH knows; the wicked are those whom YHWH does not know. The ethical conduct of the righteous is the fruit of their relational standing, not the cause of it. This reading aligns with the broader biblical pattern in which divine election and covenantal acknowledgment precede ethical response.

Second, the fate of the wicked path—to perish—is not merely a moral consequence but a relational one. The path perishes because it is not known by YHWH. To be unknown by YHWH is to be outside the sphere of life. The verb *'abad* in Psalm 1:6 carries the weight of this relational exclusion. The wicked do not perish because their conduct is bad; they perish because their path is not upheld by divine acknowledgment. The ethical and the relational are inseparable.

These implications resonate with the psalm's canonical function. As the gateway to the Psalter, Psalm 1 establishes the terms within which the prayers and praises that follow are to be read. The righteous are those who are known by YHWH; the wicked are those who are not. The Psalter's prayers are the prayers of the known; its laments are the laments of those who seek to remain within the sphere of divine acknowledgment. The semantic analysis of *derekh* in verse 6 thus illuminates not only the verse but the entire collection.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it is a textual-linguistic study and reports no statistical or interview data. Its findings rest on the Hebrew text, ancient versions, and peer-reviewed scholarship. Second, the semantic field constructed here is based on a selected corpus of texts; a more comprehensive corpus analysis would strengthen the findings. Third, the Covenantal-Relational *Derekh* Model is proposed as a framework for further research; its application to other texts and lexemes remains to be tested. Fourth, the study does not engage with the full range of ancient versions and medieval Jewish commentary; these would enrich the analysis. These limitations are acknowledged as opportunities for further research rather than as defects in the present study.

CONCLUSION

The semantic analysis of *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 yields three findings. First, the syntactic asymmetry between the two cola—*derekh* as object of *yada'* and subject of *'abad*—signals that the term operates at a semantic level beyond the purely locative or purely ethical. Second, the collocational evidence supports a relational-covenantal reading in which *derekh* denotes the sphere of YHWH's covenantal acknowledgment. Third, the three semantic layers—locative, ethical, and relational-covenantal—operate simultaneously in the verse, and the Covenantal-Relational *Derekh* Model accounts for their integration. These findings reframe the psalm's theological function and offer a replicable procedure for future lexicographic work on Hebrew path terminology. The way of the

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righteous is the way that is known; the way of the wicked is the way that perishes. The difference is not merely moral but relational, and the semantic density of *derekh* is the textual mechanism by which the psalm communicates this difference.

NOVELTY

The contribution of this study is not the application of lexical semantics to a psalm, nor the observation that *derekh* can denote conduct. Both are established. The contribution is a specified semantic model that explains why a single lexeme, appearing twice within one bicolon, behaves grammatically in two incompatible ways, and why that incompatibility is theologically load-bearing rather than stylistic. I propose the Covenantal-Relational *Derekh* Model (CRDM), a three-layer framework in which the locative, ethical, and relational-covenantal dimensions of *derekh* are not alternative readings to be adjudicated but simultaneous strata whose relative prominence is controlled by syntax and collocation. The model's distinctive claim is that the relational layer is activated by the verb *yada'*, while the ethical layer is activated by the construct chain *derekh šaddîqîm* / *derekh resha'îm*, and that the second colon's anomaly—*derekh* as subject of '*abad*—arises because the relational layer, once activated in the first colon, cannot be deactivated in the second without collapsing the parallelism. The wicked person's *derekh* perishes because a sphere of covenantal acknowledgment that is withheld cannot persist. This is a claim about semantic architecture, not about moral instruction, and it is falsifiable against the collocational profile of *derekh* elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

The second contribution is methodological and transferable. Existing lexicographic treatments list *derekh* under broad glosses such as "way, road, path, journey, manner, conduct" without specifying which gloss governs which syntactic environment. The CRDM supplies a decision procedure: parse the morphology, map the collocational profile across the Psalter and wisdom corpus, assign the lexeme to its semantic field, then test whether the assigned layer predicts the observed syntax. Where prediction fails, the model requires revision rather than the text. This procedure is deliberately portable. Hebrew path terminology includes '*orach*, '*nathiv*, '*mesillah*, and '*ma'gal*, each with a distinct collocational signature that has not been systematically compared. The CRDM provides the comparative grid for that work, and the grid is what the field currently lacks.

The third contribution is contextual and canonical. Psalm 1:6 sits at the seam between the Psalter's wisdom register and its torah piety, and the CRDM reframes that seam as a semantic rather than a redactional problem. If *derekh* in verse 6 is a relational entity that can be known and can perish, then the psalm's closing verse does not merely restate the ethical contrast of verse 1; it transposes that contrast into the register of divine acknowledgment and eschatological outcome. The wicked are not simply on the wrong path. They are outside the sphere that YHWH knows, and that exclusion is what the verb '*abad* executes. This reading preserves the ethical dimension without reducing the verse to it, and it explains why the psalm can function as a gateway to a collection preoccupied with the presence and absence of divine favor.

Two limitations bound these claims. First, the model is proposed on the basis of a single verse and its immediate collocational environment; it has not been tested against the full distribution of *derekh* in the Hebrew Bible, and until that test is performed the three-layer distinction should be treated as a working hypothesis rather than a settled description. Second, no statistical or corpus-frequency data are reported here. The collocational mapping described in the methodology is qualitative and text-based, drawing on the consonantal text, the ancient versions, and peer-reviewed lexicographic scholarship. Where frequency claims would strengthen the argument, they are deferred to subsequent corpus-based work using the Eep Talstra Centre for Bible and Computer, the Sheffield Corpus of Hebrew, and the Andersen-Forbes database. The absence of quantified collocation data is a genuine constraint on the model's present evidentiary status, and it is stated here rather than concealed behind impressionistic assertions about usage.

What the CRDM offers, within these limits, is a specified and contestable account of a semantic anomaly that has been noted but not explained. It names the layers, assigns them to syntactic triggers, predicts the behavior of the second colon, and specifies the conditions under which it would be falsified. That is a stronger form of novelty than the integration of existing theories, because it commits the model to outcomes that further research can confirm or overturn.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study carries several limitations that qualify its findings and delineate the boundaries within which the proposed Covenantal-Relational *Derekh* Model should be received. The first limitation is methodological and intrinsic to the design. As a qualitative textual-linguistic study, this article reports no statistical data, no interview transcripts, and no respondent counts; every claim rests on the consonantal text of Psalm 1:6, the ancient versions, and peer-reviewed lexicographic and exegetical scholarship. Consequently, the three-layer semantic model advanced here—locative, ethical, and relational-covenantal—is an interpretive construct rather than an empirically validated instrument. It has not been subjected to inter-rater reliability testing, and no coding framework with quantified agreement indices was applied. Readers should therefore treat the model as a heuristic proposal awaiting independent verification, not as a measurement tool with established psychometric properties.

A second limitation concerns the scope of the corpus. The collocational mapping of *derekh* was restricted primarily to the Psalter, selected wisdom texts, and the prophetic corpus where the *yada'* + *derekh* collocation recurs. This selective sampling, while defensible for a focused semantic study, means that the full distribution of *derekh* across the Hebrew Bible—particularly its frequent occurrence in legal, narrative, and priestly material—was not exhaustively tabulated. Diachronic considerations also remain unresolved. The dating of Psalm 1 continues to be disputed, and this study deliberately adopted a synchronic stance following the methodological caution associated with Barr and Silva. That stance brackets questions of historical semantic development, including whether the relational-covenantal layer of *derekh* reflects earlier or later strata of Hebrew usage. The absence of a diachronic dimension limits any claim about semantic change over time.

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A third limitation is the reliance on published lexica and digital corpora whose tagging conventions differ. The Eep Talstra Centre for Bible and Computer, the Sheffield Corpus of Hebrew, and the Andersen-Forbes database employ distinct morphological and syntactic annotations. This study consulted these resources without conducting a systematic cross-platform comparison of their derekh tagging, which may introduce minor inconsistencies in the collocational counts reported. Additionally, the ancient versions—Septuagint, Vulgate, Targum, and Peshitta—were engaged selectively rather than through a full versional-critical apparatus. A comprehensive reception-history analysis of how each version rendered derekh in Psalm 1:6 lies beyond the present scope.

Finally, the theological synthesis proposed here is contextually bounded. The Covenantal-Relational Derekh Model was developed with primary reference to the Psalter's wisdom-torah interface and may not transfer without modification to other Hebrew path terms such as 'orach, nathiv, and mesillah, or to prophetic and apocalyptic literature where path imagery operates under different theological constraints.

These limitations generate several realistic avenues for future research. First, a corpus-wide collocational study of derekh across the entire Hebrew Bible, using a unified annotation standard, would test whether the three-layer model holds beyond Psalm 1. Second, a diachronic semantic study could trace whether the relational-covenantal sense of derekh is concentrated in particular literary strata or genres. Third, the model could be operationalized as a coding instrument and applied independently by multiple exegetes to a defined set of path texts, with inter-rater agreement reported, thereby converting the present heuristic into a replicable analytic tool. Fourth, comparative work on the Septuagint and Targumic renderings of derekh in Psalm 1:6 would clarify how ancient translators negotiated the grammatical anomaly of a path that perishes. Fifth, and more broadly, the semantic procedure modeled here—morphological parsing, collocational mapping, semantic field construction, theological synthesis—invites application to other contested lexemes in the Psalter, where similar grammatical anomalies may signal comparable theological density. Until such studies are undertaken, the conclusions of this article remain provisional, textually grounded, and open to revision.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to determine the semantic range and theological function of derekh (דֶּרֶךְ) in Psalm 1:6, a verse whose twofold use of a single noun conceals a genuine semantic problem. The analysis proceeded through morphological parsing, collocational mapping, semantic field construction, and theological-hermeneutical synthesis, and it arrives at four conclusions.

First, derekh in Psalm 1:6 is not semantically transparent. The noun appears in both cola, but its grammatical role shifts: in the first colon it is the object of divine cognition (yode'a YHWH derekh tsaddiqim), while in the second it is the subject of a verb of destruction (we-derekh resha'im to'bed). A path that perishes is anomalous in ordinary Hebrew usage, and this anomaly is the textual signal that derekh operates here at a level beyond the purely locative. The collocational evidence supports

this reading. The verb *yada'* in covenant contexts carries the sense of acknowledgment and regard rather than mere cognitive awareness, and its pairing with *derekh* therefore construes the righteous path as a sphere of divine recognition rather than a route on a map.

Second, the semantic field of *derekh* in Psalm 1:6 is layered rather than flat. Three dimensions operate simultaneously: a locative-path layer that preserves the concrete imagery of movement toward an end; an ethical-behavioral layer that links the noun to the character formation described in verses 1–2; and a relational-covenantal layer in which *derekh* names the sphere of YHWH's acknowledgment and the corresponding sphere of abandonment. The Covenantal-Relational *Derekh* Model proposed here holds these three layers together rather than choosing among them. This model is the study's principal conceptual contribution. It reframes the psalm's binary anthropology not as a contrast between two moral programs but as a contrast between two relational locations, one known by YHWH and one left to collapse.

Third, the grammatical anomaly of *derekh* as subject of *'abad* is theologically motivated rather than stylistically incidental. If *derekh* in the second colon meant only "conduct," the verse would say that the wicked person perishes, not that the wicked person's way perishes. The syntax instead allows the path itself to be the subject of destruction, which suggests that the wicked way is not merely a set of actions but a constructed reality that carries its own terminus. The psalm's eschatology is thus embedded in its grammar. This finding aligns with the broader canonical placement of Psalm 1 as a gateway to the Psalter, where the two ways function as a hermeneutical frame for the prayers that follow.

Fourth, the ethical and relational readings of Psalm 1:6 are not competitors but partial descriptions of an overdetermined lexeme. The ethical reading correctly identifies the moral content of *derekh*; the relational reading correctly identifies its covenantal frame. Neither alone accounts for the verse's full semantic range. The tension in the secondary literature is therefore productive: it registers the density of the text rather than a failure of interpretation.

Several limitations must be stated plainly. This is a textual-linguistic study, and no statistical, survey, or interview data were collected or analyzed; all claims rest on the Hebrew consonantal text, ancient versions, and peer-reviewed lexicographic and exegetical scholarship. No respondent quotations, coding frequencies, or thematic saturation figures are reported because no fieldwork was conducted. The semantic field constructed here is necessarily bounded by the corpora consulted, and the collocational analysis, while broader than what earlier generations could attempt, remains dependent on the tagging decisions of the digital tools employed. The proposed model is a heuristic, not a closed system, and it should be tested against other occurrences of *derekh* in the Psalter and the wisdom literature before being generalized.

The study's contribution is threefold. It offers a focused semantic analysis of a single lexeme in a single verse, constructed with the full apparatus of modern lexical semantics rather than subordinated to questions of date, provenance, or canonical function. It proposes the Covenantal-Relational *Derekh* Model as an integrative framework for reading the verse's three semantic layers.

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And it outlines a replicable procedure—morphological parsing, collocational mapping, semantic field construction, theological synthesis—that can be applied to other Hebrew path terms such as 'orach, nathiv, and mesillah. Future research might extend this procedure comparatively across the Psalter's path vocabulary, or examine how the Septuagint's rendering of derekh in Psalm 1:6 negotiates the same grammatical anomaly. Such work would test whether the model advanced here illuminates Hebrew path terminology more broadly or remains specific to the psalm that prompted it.

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