Disjunctive Clauses Introduced by Waw + Non-verb (or Waw + Non-finite-verb)  
(Ross Lesson 21)

Almost every Hebrew clause in a text begins with waw. Surprising? Notice this string of verses from the introduction to the book of Jonah:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:1</td>
<td>וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יֹונָה בֶּן־אֲמִית לֵאמֹר׃</td>
<td>The word of Y. came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:2</td>
<td>קוֹם לֵךְ אֶל־נִינְוֵה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וְקְרָא עָלֶיהָ כִּי־עָלְתָה רָעָתָם לְפָנָי׃</td>
<td>“Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:3</td>
<td>וַיָּקָם יֹונָה לִבְרֹחַ תָּרְשִׁישׁ מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה ווַיֵּרֶד יָפֹו וַיְבָאָה לָבֹוא עִמָּהֶם תָּרְשִׁישׁ מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה׃</td>
<td>And Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of Y. and he went down to Joppa, and he found a ship which was going to Tarshish, and he gave/paid the fare, and he went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:4</td>
<td>וַיְהוָה הֶטִיל רוֹחַ גְּדוֹלָה אֶל־הַיָּם וַיְהִי סַעַר גְּדוֹל בָּיָם וְהָאָוֶן חִסֵּב לְהִשֵּׁב׃</td>
<td>And Y. hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea and the ship was about to break up.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did you notice that only v.2a did not begin with waw? Incidentally, it begins a quotation and therefore does not move the “event-storyline” forward.

In historical narrative in BH, the structural “backbone” that moves the narrative along are the verbs that report a sequence of events using wci (wayyiqtol) forms. At times, however, the author needs to stop walking you through the sequence of events and, instead, needs to show you around before getting back to the event-line. Some refer to these breaks in the narrative as off-line material, compared to mainline material. To accomplish this, the author commonly introduces the “break” with a DISJUNCTIVE WAW (so called in Ross Lesson 21).

Historical narrative sequences will chain together clauses beginning with wci (or wayyiqtol) forms—waw + a finite verb form (prefixed). Future sequences will chain together clauses beginning with wcp (or weqatal) forms—waw + a finite verb form (suffixed). BUT breaks in the sequence will have in clause-initial position waw + non-verb (like a noun, pronoun, negator) or, more rarely, waw + non-finite-verb (like a participle or infinitive).

1. Circumstantial clauses introduced by disjunctive waw.

Genesis 18:1

<table>
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<tr>
<td>וַיְרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה בִּאֵלֹנֵי מַמְרֵא וְהוֹ אָיָּשָׁב פֶּתַח־הָאֵל כִּחָם הַיּוֹם׃</td>
<td>And YHWH appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, and he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day (= while he sat).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notice the waw does begin the new clause, but it is not attached to a verb. It is attached to a pronoun: וְהו (and he). This clause with disjunctive waw does not tell us the next event in the storyline; rather, it give us the circumstances within which the action of the preceding mainline event occurred: ‘Y. appear to A. while he was sitting….’

The precise semantic value of the circumstance that a circumstantial clause bears must be inferred from the semantic context of the clauses taken together. The circumstance could be temporal (‘while, when, as’), concessive (‘although, even though’), causal (‘because’), manner (‘by’), etc. For ex.,

I could smell his BO, and I was sleeping! (concessive: ‘…even though I was sleeping!’)

John overcame the odds, and God was with him. (cause: ‘… because God was with him’)

2. Parenthetic clauses introduced by disjunctive waw.

Such clauses do not continue the mainline, but provide background or parenthetical information that is important for processing what has happened or will happen in the mainline.

Genesis 13:7

| וְהֶַּֽכ ְנַעֲנִי֙ וְהַפ ְרִז ִָ֔י | and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock.
| ואֵָ֖ז יֹש ֵֵׁ֥ב ב ָאֶָּֽרֶץ׃ | and the Canaanites and the Perizzites then were dwelling in the land. (=Now, the C & P were then dwelling….)

Notice the waw does begin the new clause, but it is not attached to a verb. It is attached to a noun (actually, a compound noun phrase): וּכְנַעֲנִי וּפָּרָ֥ז (and the Canaanites and the Perizzites). The Cs & Ps dwelling in the land is not the next event to occur after Abram’s and Lot’s herdsman fight! Rather, it provides a break in the narrative to introduce parenthetical information necessary to understand the narrative as it unfolds.

1 Ki 17:10

| וַי ֵָ֣קָם׀ וַי ֵֵ֣לֶךְ צָרְפִַ֗תָה | And he arose
| וַי ָבֹא֙ אֶל־פ ֵֶ֣תַח הָעִָ֔יר | and he went to Zarephath,
| וְהִנ ֵֶּֽה־ש ָ֛ם אִש  ֵָׁ֥ה אלְמָנֵ֖ה מְקֹשֶׁ֩ת עֵצִֽים | and behold, a widow-woman was there gathering sticks;
| וַי ִקְרָ֤א אֵלֶ֙יהָ֙ | and he called to her
| וַי ֹאמַָ֔ר | and he said, “…”

Notice that there are 6 clauses here. The first 3 and the last 2 are wci (wayyiqtols) forms that move the storyline forward as mainline events; the 4th clause, however, is waw + non-verb
‘behold’), presenting background info as opposed to the next mainline event. Once the parenthesis is complete, the mainline action resumes with a wci form again.

3. Initial clauses introduced by disjunctive waw.

Sometimes a new scene or section of the narrative begins with a disjunctive waw clause. This happens several times in the early chapters of Genesis.

Genesis 3:1

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “….”

Genesis 4:1

Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and she gave birth to Cain, and she said, “….”

Notice that each of these chapters begins a new scene using a disjunctive waw clause: a waw + non-verb (in these two clause, waw is prefixed to a noun). Once the first clause of the new scene is given, the mainline is continued by way of wci (wayyiqtols) forms.

4. Contrastive and/or negative clauses introduced by disjunctive waw.

Finally, sometimes material that is contrastive to the preceding clause, or that introduces a statement of what did not happen, is introduced by disjunctive waw.

Psalm 1:6

For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.