

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:

1:1	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים נְאָמַתִּי לֵאמֹר:	The word of Y. came to Jonah the son of Amitai saying,
1:2	קֹם לְךָ אֶל־נָינָה הַעֲרָבָה וְקָרָא עַלְתָּה כִּי־עַלְתָּה רָעָתָם לִפְנֵי:	“Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.”
1:3	וַיַּקְרֵם יוֹנָה לְבָרֶךְ תְּרִשְׁישָׁה מִלְּפָנֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּרֶד יְפֻוּ וַיַּקְרֵא אֲנִי בָּאָה תְּרִשְׁישָׁה וַיִּתְן שָׁכְרָת וַיֵּרֶד בָּהּ לְבָוֹא עַמָּהֶם תְּרִשְׁישָׁה מִלְּפָנֵי יְהוָה:	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.
1:4	וַיְהִי הַטִּיל רֹוח־גָּדוֹלָה אֶל־הָיִם וַיְהִי סֻעָּר־גָּדוֹל בֵּין וְהִנֵּה חָשֶׁבֶת לְהַשְׁבֵּר:	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.

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

וַיַּרְא אֶלְיוֹן יְהוָה בְּאֶלְגִּי מַמְרֵא וְהַוָּא יָשַׁב פָּתַח־הַאֲגָל בְּחַם־הַיּוֹם:	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).
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Notice the waw does begin the new clause, but it is not attached to a verb. It is attached to a pronoun: **וְהִוא** (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. Parenthetical 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

וַיָּהִי־רִיב בֵּין רֹאשׁי מִקְנָה־אֶבְרָם וּבֵין רֹאשׁי מִקְנָה־לֹוט וְהַכְנָעָנִים וְהַפְּרִזִּים אֲזִזְבָּן בָּאָרֶץ:	and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. and the Canaanites and the Perizzites then were dwelling in the land. (=Now, the C & P were then dwelling....)
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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): **וְהַכְנָעָנִים וְהַפְּרִזִּים** (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

וַיַּקְרֵב וַיֵּלֶךְ צָרֶפְתָּה וַיַּכְבַּא אֶל־בַּתְּחַדְּרָה וְהַנְּהָרָשָׂם אֲשֶׁר־אָלָמָה מִקְשָׁתָה עַצְיוֹן וַיִּקְרַא אֲלֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר...	And he arose and he went to Zarephath, and he came to the gate of the city, <u>and behold, a widow-woman was there</u> gathering sticks; and he called to her and he said, "...."
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Notice that there are 6 clauses here. The first 3 and the last 2 are wci (wayyiqtol) 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

וְהַשְׁנִית הָיָה עֲרוֹם מִכֶּל חֵית הַשְׁרָדָה אֲשֶׁר עַשְׂתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים כֹּהֵן אָשָׁה...:	<u>Now the serpent</u> was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “....”
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Genesis 4:1

וְהִיא בָּרָךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים וְתַהַרְתְּ וְתַלְדַּת אֶת־קַיִן וְתֹאמֶר...:	<u>Now the man</u> knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and she gave birth to Cain, and she said, “....”
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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 (wayyiqtol) 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

כִּי־יְדַעַת יְהוָה דָּרְךָ צְדִיקִים וְדָרְךָ רְשָׁעִים תָּאכַל:	For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.
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