

Some Examples of *Waw Explicativum*

by Seth Erlandsson

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The Hebrew *waw* (ו) conjunctive has a number of functions. In this article we shall take a look at the explanatory and definitive function which *waw* often has. The second member in a parallel construction is often subordinate to the first and is intended to define or explain the preceding member or to give attendant circumstances. The Hebrew connective ought in such cases not be translated with “and” but instead with “namely, that is to say, more precisely, in that, just as, at the same time as, in connection with, and especially” or in some similar fashion. That *waw* often has this function is well-known,¹ and yet it is often forgotten by Bible translators and commentators. In the following we shall give some examples of what we for the sake of brevity would include under the title *waw explicativum*.

In Genesis 4:4 we find the account of Abel’s sacrifice. Abel “brought of the firstlings of his flock.” But the author wishes to be more precise and therefore he adds וַיִּמְקְלֵבָהֶן, which means “(more precisely) of their fatlings.” In Swedish it is often customary to add a further explanation of definition without an “and.” Therefore *waw* here can be left untranslated or it can be translated with “namely, that is to say, more precisely.” The situation is exactly the same, for example, in Zechariah 9:9. Zion’s king comes “lowly and riding upon an ass, (more precisely) upon a colt, the foal of an ass” (וְעַל-עֵיִר בֶּן-אֶתְנָנוֹת).² When the LXX translates ἐπὶ ὑποζύγιον καὶ πῶλον νέον one ought to observe that also the Greek καὶ can have an explanatory function.³

In 2 Samuel 20:14 it says that Sheba came to אֲבֵלָה וְבֵית מַעֲכָה. KB (the Church Bible of 1917) translates “Abel and Beth-Maachah,” but also here we have a *waw explicativum*: Sheba came to Abel, namely (that is to say), Beth-Maachah.” Since it is in this way explained that the city was called Abel as well as Beth-maachah (cp 1 Ki 15:20 and 2 Ki 15:29), *waw* does not need to be used in verse 15, and in verse 18 the city can simply without misunderstanding be called “Abel.” NASB (New American Standard Bible) translates, very correctly, “to Abel even to Beth-Maachah” (v 14). Others are blind to *waw*’s explanatory function and for that reason feel the need to emend the text.⁴

In Psalm 75:11 we read (if the *waw* is translated “and”), “why do you hold back your hand and your right hand?” Here again we have a *waw explicativum* with the meaning “(more precisely) thy right hand.” In Psalm 85:8 it says, “For he will speak peace to his people, and to his saints.” Also here we have a defining “and.”⁵

¹ See, for example, H. Ewald, *Ausführliches Lehrbuch der hebraeischen Sprache*, 1870, par. 341; E. Koenig, *Syntax der hebraeischen Sprache*, 1897, par. 360, 362; Gesenius-Kautzsch, *Hebraeische Grammatik*,²⁵ 1889, par. 154, 156; A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax*,² 1896, par. 136; C. Brockelmann, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen* II, 1913, par. 321; Brockelmann, *Hebraeische Syntax*, 1956, par. 139; R. Meyer, *Hebraeische Grammatik* III,³ 1972, p 91; Brown-Driver-Briggs, pp 251ff; KBL, p 245.

² “The ו before וְעַל-עֵיִר is expegetical, describing the ass as a young animal, not yet ridden, but still running behind the she-asses,” C.F. Keil, *Minor Prophets*, *Comm. on the OT*, Engl. Trans. reprint 1975, p 334. “Das ו vor וְעַל expliziert vgl. *Ges.-Kautzsch*²⁷ par. 154a,” E. Selling, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch*, KAT XII,³ 1929, p 551.

³ See, e.g., He 12:22: “But you have come to Mt. Zion καὶ πόλει θεοῦ ζῶντος (more precisely) to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” Here the writer wants to make more definite or explain what he means by “Mt. Zion” and he does this with the help of the copula καὶ. In the translation, “You have come to Mt. Zion and the city of the living God” (K-B 1917), it does not become clear that the “and-phrase” gives a more detailed explanation of what is meant by “Mt. Zion” in this context.

⁴ So, e.g., H.P. Smith, *The Books of Samuel*, ICC, 1899, p 371: “as only one city is besieged we should read בֵּית here as in v. 15.” See also Kittel’s critical apparatus in BH³ and the footnote in NEB (New English Bible).

⁵ “The and has a sort of exegetical force, with a certain emphasis on the word that explains, Ps. 74:11 thy hand and (even) thy right hand. Ps 85:8 to his people and to his saints . . .,” Davidson, *op. cit.*, par. 136.

In Amos 3:11 we meet the expression **צַר וְסָבִיב הָאָרֶץ**. This ought to be translated: “A tyrant, one who attacks the land from every side.”⁶ The NASB very correctly translates, “An enemy, even one surrounding the lands,” while the NEB, which usually is blind to *waw explicativum*, feels the need to emend the text.

Malachi 3:1 has the phrase,

וּמְלֹאֵךְ הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר-אַתֶּם חֹפְצִים,

a very clear explanation of

הָאֵלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר-אַתֶּם מְבַקְשִׁים,

“The Lord whom ye seek, that is to say, the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in.” Keil justifiably comments, “The identity of the angel of the covenant with the ‘Lord’ (הָאֵלֹהִים) is placed beyond the reach of doubt by the parallelism of the clauses, and the notion is hereby refuted that the ‘covenant angel’ is identical with the person previously mentioned as **מְלֹאֵךְ**.”⁷

In I Chronicles 5:26 we have another example of *waw explicativum* in the expression:

**אֶת-רוּחַ פּוּל מֶלֶךְ-אַשּׁוּר
וְאֶת-רוּחַ תִּלְגַּת פְּלִנְסֵר מֶלֶךְ-אַשּׁוּר**

This time even the NEB recognizes that the *waw* is explanatory: “Pul king of Assyria, *that is* Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria.” NASB translates, “The spirit of Pul king of Assyria, *even* the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria,” and J.M. Myers maintains in his commentary that “Pul and Tilgath-pilneser refer to the same person.”⁸ KB 1917 evidently supposes that the Chronicler did not clearly understand that Pul and Tilgath-pilneser are the same person. Because of that it has not only failed to understand correctly the significance of *waw* but also the identity of the subject of the verb **וַיִּגְלֵם**, which is in the singular. The Assyrian king Pul, that is Tiglath-pilneser, is the subject of **וַיִּגְלֵם**, but KB 1917 is forced to make “the God of Israel” of verse 26a the subject also in verse 26b, because it translated as though two kings were involved.

In the same way as in I Chronicles 5:26 it is possible that we are dealing with a *waw explicativum* in Daniel 6:28 (MT), where we meet the parallel expression

**בְּמַלְכוּת דָּרְיוֹשׁ
וּבְמַלְכוּת כּוֹרֶשׁ פַּרְסִיָּא**

“So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, that is in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” Such an explanatory note is natural as a conclusion to the section 6:1–28 (MT). Darius the Mede, who took the kingdom of Babylon at the age of 62 (6:1), was to the Jews and generally better known under the name of “Cyrus the Persian,” and therefore this section is concluded with the explanation “that is (Heb. *waw*) in the reign of Cyrus the Persian” (6:28).⁹ Just as the first part of Daniel’s book, chapters 1–6, is constructed chronologically, so also Daniel’s visions in chapters 7–12 are dated chronologically, if “Darius the Mede” and Cyrus are the same person: the first year of the reign of Belshazzar, that is ca. 555 B.C. (ch. 7), the third year of the reign of Belshazzar ca. 553 B.C. (ch. 8), the first year of the reign of Darius ca. 538 B.C. (ch. 9) and the third year of the reign of Cyrus ca. 536 B.C. (ch. 10–12).

In 2 Kings 25:9 the statement that Nebuzaradan burned up “all the houses of Jerusalem” is more closely defined. This definition is introduced with *waw*: **וְאֶת-כָּל-בַּיִת גְּדוּל שָׂרָף בְּאֵשׁ**, which ought to be translated,

⁶ See my *Provoersætning av Amos’ bok* (Biblicum, Uppsala), 1976.

⁷ Keil, *op. cit.*, p 458. K. Elliger is blind to the fact that the **ו** here is explanatory. Consequently, he believes that v 1b is “ein Einschub” and that “the messenger of the covenant” is to be identified with **מְלֹאֵךְ** in v 1a, *Das Buch der zwölf kleinen Propheten II*, ATD 25, 1964, p 208.

⁸ 1 Chronicles, *The Anchor Bible* 12, 1965, p 34.

⁹ D.J. Wiseman translates, “Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, even (namely, or i.e.) the reign of Cyrus the Persian” and argues, in my opinion convincingly, for this solution to the problem of “Darius the Mede,” see Wiseman, *Notes on some problems in the Book of Daniel*, 1965, pp 9ff.

“That is to say, all the great houses he burned up in fire.”¹⁰ NASB translates “*even every great house he burned with fire,*” while NEB in its customary fashion emends the text, just as Kittel and Noth in the critical apparatus of the third edition of the *Biblia Hebraica*.

Amos 7:14

“The interpretation of 7:14 is the most controverted problem in the book of Amos,” writes J. L. Mays in his commentary on Amos.¹¹ The translation “I am neither a prophet nor a prophet’s son” (KB 1917) seems to conflict with the context. The seriousness of Amaziah’s attack on Amos after all consists in this that it is an attack on God, for Amos does not speak on his own behalf but only what God has sent him to speak, that is to say, he is God’s spokesman, a prophet¹² (cp 7:15ff; 1:ff; and 3:1ff). The translation “I was not a prophet ...” is an attempt to avoid the denial that Amos now is a prophet. But thereby one loses sight of the fact that the prophet in his answer to Amaziah wants to distinguish himself very carefully from the professional prophets. “*Man wird dem Gewicht dieses Satzes an dieser Stelle doch eher gerecht, wenn man ihn versteht als Zurueckweisung der nicht nur dem Amazja gelaefigen Meinung, dass auch er wie andere 'Propheten' es noetig habe, seinen Lebensunterhalt durch seine prophetische Taetigkeit zu bestreiten.*”¹³

The solution of the problem in Amos 7:14 seems clear in the light of the above cited examples of *waw explicativum*. We have here two parallel sentences

לֹא־נָבִיא אֲנִי
וְלֹא בֶן־נָבִיא אֲנִי

It is evident that the second sentence, introduced with *waw*, is intended to define more precisely in what sense Amos is not a prophet: “I am not a prophet, (that is to say, more precisely) I am not a son of a prophet (professional prophet).”¹⁴ W. Rudolf is one of the few who took notice of this *waw explicativum*. He understands the words to mean, “*Ich bin kein Prophet, naemlich keiner, der einer Prophetengilde angehoert.*”¹⁵ Before him E. Vogt pleaded for this solution, saying, “He is a נָבִיא, that is, I am no בֶן־נָבִיא, I am no professional, self-chosen נָבִיא, but a prophet whom God has called.”¹⁶

Amos 5:25–26

We have in the Old Testament quite a number of synthetic sentences (*syntetiska tillstondsatser*), which do not intend to go more deeply into the situation but instead are intended to report *Nebenumstaende*.¹⁷ Let us cite a few examples:

Isaiah 3:7: “I cannot be a healer, *when (since, while) there is no bread in my house*” (וּבִיְתִי אֵין לֶחֶם).¹⁸ A verbatim translation of Amos 7:7 is “The Lord stood on a plumb wall and in His hand was a plumb bob.” Also here “and” gives more details, and therefore *waw* has the meaning “just as, at the same time”: “The Lord stood on a plumb wall (in that He had, or briefly and succinctly) with a plumb bob in His hand” (וּבְיָדוֹ אֲנָה). In Isaiah 1:13b the more detailed circumstances are given with only one word: אָנֹכְךָ וְעֵצְרָה. KB 1917 here

¹⁰ Meyer translates: “*dass heisst, er verbrannte /nur/ jedes grosse Haus mit Feuer,*” *op. cit.*, p 91. “*Von den zahlreichen Funktionen des Waw.cop. als koordinierender Konjunktion seien der adversative und der erklärende Gebrauch hervorgehoben,*” he maintains.

¹¹ Amos, 1969, p 137.

¹² See Erlandsson, *Profet och profetia enligt Bibeln* (Biblicums smoskrifter nr 4), 1975, pp 7ff.

¹³ A. Weiser, *Das Buch der zwoelf kleinen Propheten I*, ATD 24, ²1956, p 191 n.1. One must also share H. W. Wolff’s conclusion that “*Umfaseendere syntaktische Erwaegungen sprechen also fuer ein praesentisches Verstaendnis von 14,*” Dodekapropheton 2: Joel und Amos, BK 14:2, 1969, p 360.

¹⁴ “בֶן־נָבִיא namely does not mean ‘son of a prophet,’ but a member of a guild of prophets,” E. Hammershaimb, *Amos*, ⁴1973, p 113.

¹⁵ *Joel-Amos-Obadja-Jona*, KAT 13:2, 1971, p 249.

¹⁶ *Waw explicative in Amos vii.14*, *Expository Times* 1956/57, p 301.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Brockelmann, *Hebraeische Syntax*, par. 139, and Gesenius-Kautzsch, *op. cit.*, par. 156.

¹⁸ Ges.-Kautzsch: “*Ich mag nicht Wundarzt sein, waehrend in meinem Hause kein Brod ist,*” *op. cit.*, par. 156.

translates ו very properly: “Evil in connection with the solemn assembly.” In Genesis 18:1 יהוה יִשָּׁב records the situation that obtained when יהוה revealed Himself to Abraham at the grove of terebinths at Mamre, and thus it ought to be translated “when he sat...” In Genesis 24:10 the *waw*-sentence,

וְכָל־טוֹב אֲדָנָיו בְּיָדוֹ,

tells us under what circumstances Abraham’s servant went on his way: “*Er ging, indem er alle Kostbarkeiten seines Herrn in seiner Hand hatte.*”¹⁹

In the light of these examples one should be able to solve the problem in Amos 5:25–26, a problem that up to the present time has defied all solution and has been called “formidable.”²⁰ In an article published in 1968²¹ I was very close to the solution of this problem when I maintained that verse 26 “constitutes a defining adjunct to the main topic” as “a sentence which describes the situation in 25.”²² However, I did not completely understand what the full significance of this description is.

In Amos 5:25–26 we find this combination of sentences:

הֲ... הַגִּשְׁתֶּם־לִי
וַיִּשְׂאֲתֶם ...

The question הֲ... הַגִּשְׁתֶּם־לִי, which requires a negative answer, cannot be correctly understood if one ignores the subordinate sentence which defines the situation. The prophet is posing the following question: “Did you offer to me sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness, you of the house of Israel, (26) when (as, while) you carried around your star god whom you made for yourselves, the tabernacle of your king, and the stand (base) of your images?”²³ The prophet therefore is not denying that sacrifices were already brought during the wilderness period. What he wants to assert is that when offering with syncretism or disobedience to the Lord’s מִשְׁפָּחָי, one does not really sacrifice to the Lord. Just as the song in praise of the Lord is not a song but only “noise” (5:23), when it is joined to disobedience to the Lord’s Word, so also the many offerings are not really offerings, when they are brought in conjunction with idol worship. We find the same thought in Isaiah 1:10–17, where it is maintained the sacrifices are useless and an abomination, when one at the same time with the sacrifice does not want to listen to the Word of the Lord. “Evil in conjunction with (Heb. *waw*) the solemn meeting I cannot tolerate” (v 13b).

Perhaps the opinion in Bethel was that the cultus there was Jahvistic and that one could support it by the wilderness tradition, which said that Jahweh already during the wilderness period had desired sacrifices from them. What occasion therefore did this Amos have for standing up in the king’s chapel (7:13) to accuse them? Did not Jahweh receive the sacrifice He desired, yes, even ‘the thank offerings of fat beasts’ (5:22)?²⁴ The prophet does not in that connection deny that sacrifices were offered in the wilderness, but he asserts that when also in the wilderness period sacrifices were brought in combination with disobedience to God, it was not a sacrifice but an abomination, of which the Lord wanted to know nothing (5:21ff), a hypocritical obedience which brought condemnation upon itself: “Therefore will I drive you into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts” (5:27).

The *versions* have thus interpreted the relation between verse 25 and verse 26 correctly, when they understood וַיִּשְׂאֲתֶם as a perfect with the copula *waw* and not as a consecutive perfect. When the LXX translates וַיִּשְׂאֲתֶם literally with *καὶ ἀνελάβετε* we ought to keep in mind that the Greek *καὶ* can function in the same way as the Hebrew *waw*. The LXX also permits the question to include both verse 25 and verse 26. In verse 26 we find the circumstances under which the question in verse 25 is to be answered negatively. Therewith it is also

¹⁹ Brockelmann, *op. cit.*, par. 139.

²⁰ See, e.g., Mays, *op. cit.*, p 110 and Hammershaimb, *op. cit.*, p 87.

²¹ Erlandsson, Amos 5:25–27, *a crux interpretum*, SEA 33, 1968, pp 76ff.

²² *Ibid.*, p 79.

²³ The reason for emending v 26 in such a way as to make it refer to the Assyrian gods Sakkut and Kaiwan is not convincing. See Keil, *op. cit.*, pp 291–296. “The two כִּכֹּרֹת and כִּיּוֹן are undoubtedly appellatives” (Keil, p 291) and “כִּכֹּרֹת was no doubt a portable shrine, in which the image of the deity was kept,” (Keil, p 292f).

²⁴ Erlandsson, *op. cit.*, p 81.

said that not only in the time of Amos but also in the wilderness period apostasy from God occurred, and already then the attempt was made to combine sacrifice (obedience) with disobedience. Consequently Stephen in Acts 7 can cite Amos 5:25–27 as proof that already in the wilderness period Israel had fallen away into idolatry. Acts 7:42b–43a ought to be translated, “Did you offer to me slain beasts and sacrifices during the forty years in the wilderness, you of the house of Israel, when (Greek καὶ) you carried about the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Remphan, images, which you made to worship?”²⁵

We have seen that Amos in 7:14 and 5:25–26 comes with a declaration and with a question, which through a *waw*-sentence gives a close definition or an explanation. Because this syntactical nicety was lost sight of, a sentence which was clear and plain in itself became a “formidable” problem. When one seriously misunderstood what the prophet wants to say in 7:14 and in 5:25f, one is led to separate the defining *waw*-clause from the main clause. So far as Amos 5:25f is concerned this has also led to the conclusion that Amos supposedly denies “that sacrifices and offerings were the mode of Israel’s relation to Yahweh during the wilderness years.”²⁶ As further support for this view it is customary to cite Jeremiah 7:21–23. But thereby one shows a misunderstanding also of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah, just as little as Amos, denies that sacrifice was practised in the wilderness period. In chapter 7:21ff Jeremiah wants to assert that the institution of sacrifice is not primary but is *preceded* by a demand for obedience. All offering *presupposes* obedience to God’s Word and it is meaningless when it is torn out of the context of obedience.²⁷ Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah with one voice assert that worship without faith and obedience is an abomination. True sacrifice presupposes that one bows before the words and judgments of the Lord, that one confesses one’s sins, flees to the Lord’s mercy, and listens to His Word (cp Ps 51:19). Disobedience can never be compensated for by ever more zealous sacrifice. “The sacrifice of the ungodly is an abomination to the Lord” (Pr 15:8).

Conclusion

We have in this article taken a look at the defining and explanatory function which a *waw*-clause often has. Through a number of examples we have shown the importance of a correct understanding of the function of *waw*-clauses. When the defining function of *waw*-clauses is forgotten, for example, in Amos 3:11, 5:25f, and 7:14, this has led to unnecessary emendations and incorrect interpretations. It seems that greater awareness concerning the occurrence of the so-called *waw-explicativum* can contribute to the solution of more than one *crux interpretum*.

²⁵ Nestle-Aland (²⁵1963) correctly places the comma after v 42 and the question mark after v 43.

²⁶ Mays, *op. cit.*, p 111. Hammershaimb is of the opinion that Amos operates on the basis of a “well-known fact, that the people did not offer sacrifice during the wilderness period,” *op. cit.*, p 87, and Wolff maintains, just as Wellhausen and many others, that Amos 5:25f implies “*die Vorstellung der opferlosen Fruehzeit*,” *op. cit.*, p 309.

²⁷ Concerning the interpretation of Jer 7:21ff, see my article in *SEA* 33, 1968, p 81, n 23.