

Online Appendix for

Does God Command Birth Control?

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Appendix. Various Meanings of ו

The key to understanding TC is understanding the meanings of the וs that are contained in it. In Hebrew, the ו is a conjunction, i.e., a part of speech which joins syntactic units such as words, phrases, or clauses. It is most commonly thought of as equivalent to English “and”, and in certain contexts, to “but” or “or”. In reality, Hebrew’s ו covers a great deal more territory, at least from an Indo-European point of view. It is important to be *consciously aware* of the

various options available in translating this conjunction lest we prejudice the interpretation of Biblical Hebrew text as a result of grammatical tunnel vision.

Choon-Leong Seow's standard introductory text on Biblical Hebrew [A1] identifies six different usages of ו and gives examples of each [A2]:

A.1. Copulative ו and its variants

The *copulative* ו has several variants, the simple, the adversative, and the alternative.

The *simple* ו is best represented in English by “and”. Some examples of it from the Tanakh are:

a. *Genesis* 1:1

בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ

in a beginning, God created ((the heaven) and (the earth))

Here, the ו joins two noun phrases, which together form the direct object of the verb.

b. *Genesis* 1:2a

והארץ היתה תהו ובהו

and (the earth was ((formless) and (void)))

The first ו is used to join the following sentence in a narrative sequence from the preceding sentence to the following sentence, while the second ו joins two adjectives to form the adjectival complement of the verb. Seow treats this simple use of ו using a dozen of his own examples early in his book, on Pages 58–59.

One variant of the copulative ו *that joins two sentences in a narrative sequence* is the *consecutive* ו, which occurs as a prefix to a verb in perfect (past tense) or imperfect (future tense). The effects of such a ו are to (1) to establish the narrative sequencing and (2) invert the tense of the verb, changing the perfect to imperfect and vice versa. The first example of a consecutive ו in the Tanakh

is:

c. *Genesis* 1:3:

ויאמר אלהים יהי אור ויהי-אור

and (God said there will be light) and (there was light)

The two ו establish a narrative sequence. In addition, the first ו converts the imperfect form יאמר to past tense, and the second ו converts the imperfect form יהי to past tense. Note that the earlier occurrence of יהי is not prefixed by ו; so it remains in future tense.

A variant of the general copulative ו is the *adversative* ו, in which case, either the items being joined are either explicitly opposed, e.g., when the second is marked with לֹא, or the semantics require it. On Page 284, Seow offers the example:

d. *Kohelet* 4:13a

טוב ילד מסכן וחכם

good is the boy ((poor) and (wise))

good is the ((poor) but (wise)) boy

It is hardly good to be poor *and* wise.

The other variation of the copulative ו is the *alternative* ו, which deals with items which are somehow mutually exclusive. An example cited by Seow (284) is:

e. *Exodus* 20:9

ויום השביעי שבת ליהוה אלהיך לא תעשה כל מלאכה אתה ובנך

ובתך עבדך ואמתך ובהמתך וגרך אשר בשעריך

and (the seventh day is a sabbath to your God; will not do any work: ((you) and (your son) and (your daughter) and (your male servant) and (your female servant) and (your animal) and (your stranger that is within your gates))

but (the seventh day is a sabbath to your God; (neither (you) nor (your son) nor (your daughter) nor (your male servant) nor (your female servant) nor (your animal) nor (your stranger that is within your gates) will do any work)

The first ׀ is another example of joining two sentences in a narrative sequence, but in this case, what follows the ׀, namely “the seventh day”, is distinguished from the rest of the days. The remaining ׀s in the example form a logical expression,

not (A and B and C and D and E and F and G),
which can be expressed more naturally as
neither A nor B nor C nor D nor E nor F nor G,
which, in turn, can be expressed even more naturally as
neither A, B, C, D, E, F, nor G.

A.2. Explicative ׀

An *explicative* ׀ is one for which the phrase following it provides amplification to the phrase preceding it. Consider Seow’s example on Page 284:

f. *1 Samuel* 17:40a:

ויקח מקלו בידו ויבחר לו חמשה חלקי אבנים מן הנחל וישם אתם בכלי
הרעים אשר לו ובילקוט

and (he took his stick in his hand) and (he chose for himself five pieces of stone from the river) and (he placed them ((into the shepherd’s tool that he had) and (into his bag))

and (he took his stick in his hand) and (he chose for himself five pieces of stone from the river) and (he placed them ((into the shepherd’s tool that he had) that is (into his bag))

The explicative ׀ is the last ׀ in the example. Clearly, David (the “he” in the narrative) did not put the five stone pieces into two separate locations; he put them into only one. The phrase after this ׀ is a gloss on the phrase before this ׀, explaining that the shepherd’s tool that he had was his bag. Thus, this ׀ should be translated as “that is”.

A.3. Circumstantial ׀

A *circumstantial* ׀ joins clauses that describe contemporaneous events. Seow offers the following examples on Pages 232 and 284:

g. *Genesis* 19:1a

ויבאו שני המלאכים סדמה בערב ולוט ישב בשער סדם

and ((the two angels came towards Sodom in the evening) and (Lot sat at the gate of Sodom))

and ((the two angels came towards Sodom in the evening) while (Lot sat at the gate of Sodom))

The second ו is the circumstantial one. Translating it as “and” might give the impression that the text is talking about unrelated events, but in fact, the events are connected and *are happening at the same time*. Therefore, this ו should be rendered “while” for a more meaningful translation.

h. *Genesis 45:14*

ויפל על צוארי בנימן אחיו ויבך ובנימן בכה על צואריו

and (he fell upon the neck of Benjamin his brother) and ((he wept) and (Benjamin wept upon his neck))

and (he fell upon the neck of Benjamin his brother) and ((he wept) as (Benjamin wept upon his neck))

Seow suggests “as” for translating the second and circumstantial ו, but one might view Benjamin’s action as a response to one initiated by Joseph (the “he” in the narrative). Perhaps, “and in response,” would be a better translation.

i. *2 Kings 8:7a*

ויבא אלישע דמשק ובן הדד מלך ארם חלה

and ((Elisha came to Damascus) and (Ben-Hadad, king of Aram was ill))

and ((Elisha came to Damascus) when (Ben-Hadad, king of Aram was ill))

The circumstantial ו is the second one. In this instance, the subsequent context reveals that the clause about Ben-Hadad—an independent comment relative to Elisha’s coming to Damascus—is introduced to provide a backdrop for the subsequent narrative. A translation of “when” or, even better, “at a time when”, seems appropriate.

j. *Deuteronomy 5:19a*

ויהי כשמעכם את הקול מתוך החשך וההר בער באש

and ((it happened that when you heard the voice from within the darkness) and (the

mountain burned with fire))

and ((it happened that you heard the voice from within the darkness) while (the mountain burned with fire))

Here, the combination of (1) כ, literally “when”, in front of שמעכם, and (2) the subsequent ו, means “while” in the place of the second and circumstantial ו.

In each of the examples (c) through (j), translating the salient ו as “and” might be acceptable. However, “and” makes a rather wooden translation in English. It is clear that a good rendering of ו is not just a matter of syntax. It is equally a matter of taking into account the semantic overtones of the clauses concerned and their relations to one another.

A.4. Commands in narrative sequence

Seow also has, starting on Page 243, a short section on commands in a narrative sequence, which is the form of TC. Several of his examples are directly pertinent to understanding TC:

k. *Isaiah 55:1b*

לכו שברו ואכלו ולכו שברו בלוא כסף ובלוא מחיר יין וחלב
((come buy) and (eat)) and (come buy ((without money) and (without price)) ((wine) and (milk)))

((come buy) in order to (eat)) and (come buy ((without money) and (without price)) ((wine) and (milk)))

The text preceding the example is about thirsty people, and שבר means “to buy” with the assumption that what is bought is edible. Translating the first ו as “and” is acceptable, and many translations do just that. However, it is clear that one cannot eat until one has bought something to eat, i.e. the eating is contingent having obtained something to eat. Hence, this ו is better translated as “in order to”. Each of the other וs in the example is copulative.

l. *Genesis 47:19b*

ותן זרע ונחיה ולא נמות והאדמה לא תשם
and ((give seed) and (we will live and we will not die) and (the soil will not be barren))

and ((give seed) in order that (((we will live) that is (we will not die)) and (the soil will not be barren)))

The first ו is copulative at the sentence level. The second ו really means “in order that” because living and the soil’s not being barren is contingent on having gotten seed to plant in the soil in order to grow food and feed livestock; growing food and feeding livestock, in turn, ensure that the “we” will live. The third ו is explicative, explaining that living is not dying. The fourth ו is actually copulative at the clause level, saying that a consequence of our getting seed, other than our living, is that the soil will not be barren. This copulative nature of the fourth ו is clear from the parentheses in the presented translation, parentheses which are not normally present in writing. To make the meaning clear in normal writing, a translation should repeat the “in order that” after an “and” translation of the fourth ו:

and ((give seed) in order that ((we will live) that is (we will not die)) and in order that (the soil will not be barren))

m. *Ruth* 1:9a

יתן יהוה לכם ומצאן מנוחה אשה בית אישה

(The Lord will grant you (pl.) and (you (pl) will find rest, each woman in the house of her man)

(The Lord will grant) that (you (pl) will find rest, each woman in the house of her man)

Translating the ו as “and” simply does not work, because doing so leaves it unspecified what the Lord is granting to the two women. In each of the first three examples of commands in a narrative sequence, translating ו as “and” does work, but in this example, translating ו as “and” does not work. Some kind of alternative must be used. Seow suggests “so that”, but sometimes “in order to”, “in order that”, or just plain “that” works better.

In each of most examples cited thus far, ו has effectively joined items, whether words, phrases, or clauses, at the same structural level, that is, in a coordinating fashion. However, in the example from *Ruth*, the ו effectively amounts to a subordinating conjunction (a.k.a., a *subjunction*), *from the English viewpoint*. It is important not to project modern linguistic frameworks onto an ancient language whose speakers may or may not have made the same

distinctions.

A.5. Statistics on ו in *Genesis* 1—11

There are 823 instances of the conjunction ו in *Genesis* 1—11. An analysis of each of these וs, with a conservative leaning towards maintaining “and”, yields the following counts for each meaning:

“and”—796 instances which could fairly naturally be rendered “and” or something similar, such as “as well as”, or which serve as a consecutive ו.

“as for”—1:

Genesis 9:9

ואני הנני מקים את בריתי אתכם

as for me (here I am, establishing my covenant with you)

This interpretation is needed, because the preceding text outlined the obligations upon Noah and his descendants in a sentence structured like this one.

“but”—10:

Genesis 2:6.1 has וְ in previous clause but not the current one; Each of *Genesis* 2:20.11, 3:3.1, 4:5.1, and 4:7.5 has וְ in the current clause, but not in the previous one. Each of *Genesis* 4:7.13, 6:8.1, 6:18.1, 8:1.1, and 11:31.25 is in semantic contrast with the previous clause.

“nor”—1:

Genesis 3:3.11 has וְ in the current clause and also in the preceding one.

“now”—1

The ו in *Genesis* 3:1.1 could translated as “and”, but there is a break in the narrative, a term is needed that makes the break clear. Probably there are other instances among the 796 “and” interpretations that mark similar clear breaks in the narrative.

“so that”—5

Genesis 2:7.13

וייצר יהוה אלהים את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי
האדם לנפש חיה

and (The Lord God formed the human, soil from the ground) and (He breathed into its nostrils the soul of life) so that (the human became a living being)

Here, “and” would work for the third ו, but it is clear that the final clause describes the consequence of God’s two previous actions taken in sequence.

Genesis 6:2.10

ויראו בני האלהים את בנות האדם כי טבת הנה ויקחו להם נשים מכל אשר
בחרו

and (the sons of the gods saw that the daughters of the man were fair) so that (they took for themselves wives from among them, according to his choice)

Genesis 6:4.16

הנפלים היו בארץ בימים ההם וגם אחרי כן אשר יבאו בני האלהים אל בנות
האדם וילדו להם

(the Nephilim (giants) were on the earth in those days) and (also afterwards, the sons of the gods will go into the daughters of the man) so that (they will bear children to them)

The passage is somewhat obscure. Nevertheless, it is clear that the reason that the sons of the gods will go into the daughters of the man is so that the daughters will bear children for the sons.

Genesis 3:5.8

כי ידע אלהים כי ביום אכלכם ממנו ונפקחו עיניכם והייתם כאלהים ידעי
טוב ורע

(for God knew that on the day that you eat from it) that (your eyes will) so that (you will be as God, knowing ((good) and (evil))

This sentence has three וs. For the first use, a mere “and” cannot possibly work; a “that” is needed. For the second, the “so that” makes it clear that what follows is a consequence of the opening of the eyes. The third is a simple copulative “and”; although “from” would work as well.

Genesis 8:17

כל החיה אשר אתך מכל בשר בעוף ובבהמה ובכל הרמש הרמש על הארץ

הוצא (היצא) אתך ושרצו בארץ ופרו ורבו על הארץ

(every living animal that is with you, from each flesh including bird and animal and each creeper that creeps on the earth, bring out with you) so that (they will swarm over the earth) and (be fruitful) so that (they will multiply on the earth.)

There are several וs in the sentence, most of which are simply the copulative “and”. It is obvious, however, that the various creatures are being saved in order that they will be able to resume their earthly activities when the flood is over.

“that” — 7

Genesis 3:5.8; that is, the last “so that” example has also a “that”.

Genesis 4:3.4

ויהי מקץ ימים ויבא קין מפרי האדמה מנחה ליהוה

and (it happened after several days) that (Cain brought from the fruit of the ground an offering to to the Lord)

Genesis 4:8.9

ויאמר קין אל הבל אחיו ויהי בהיותם בשדה ויקם קין אל הבל אחיו ויהרגוהו
and (Cain spoke to Abel his brother) and (it happened while they were in the open field) that (Cain (rose up against his brother Abel) and (killed him))

Genesis 7:10.4

ויהי לשבעת הימים ומי המבול היו על הארץ

and (it happened in the seven days) that (the floodwaters were over the earth)

Genesis 7:19.7

והמים גברו מאד מאד על הארץ ויכסו כל ההרים הגבהים

and (the water was so very very victorious over the land) that (it covered all the tall mountains.)

Genesis 9:14—15.1

והיה בענני ענן על הארץ ונראתה הקשת בענן וזכרתי את בריתי

and (it will be when I will cloud clouds over the earth) and (the rainbow will be in the cloud) that (I will remember my covenant)

Genesis 11:2.4

ויהי בנסעם מקדם וימצאו בקעה בארץ שנער

and (it happened while they journeyed from the east) that (they found a valley in the land of Shinar)

“then” — 1

Genesis 4:24.5

כי שבעתים יקם קין ולמך שבעים ושבעה

(if seven times avenged will be Cain) then (Lemech seventy-seven times)

The ׀ in this case introduces the apodosis following the protasis.

“when” — 2

Genesis 5:6.7

ויחי שת חמש שנים ומאת שנה ויולד את אנוש

and (Sheth had lived 105 years) when (he fathered Enosh)

Genesis 7:6.6

ונח בן שש מאות שנה והמבול היה מים על הארץ

and (Noah was six hundred years old) when (the flood brought water over the earth).

A.6. Summary

The evidence is that any ׀ conjunction can correspond to any of “and”, “but”, “or”, “that is”, “while”, “in response to”, “in order that”, “so that”, and “that”. In most cases, the choice amounts to the difference between literalism and polished style, but in at least one case surveyed, a subordinating function is necessarily called for in translation.

Upon reflection, it becomes apparent that English speakers occasionally use “and” with at least some of the same additional meanings, at least in colloquial speech. The flowery language used by traditional translations of the Bible notwithstanding, ancient Hebrew writers to a large extent wrote familiarly or colloquially rather than formally.

Consider the following instruction in English:

Get dressed, and go to the store!

This instruction can be parsed as:

(Get dressed,) and (go to the store.),

that is, as a sequence of two imperative clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction, “and”, and at first glance, this parse seems fine. However, it is clear that the instruction is talking neither about separate, disconnected events nor simultaneous events. The instruction really has a premise and a consequence. Certainly, there are two events, but the first command is issued *specifically* in order to make the second command possible, and in fact, with the main intent that the second command be carried out.

Finally, Seow notes on Pages 111—112 that $\gamma\psi\alpha$, which normally means “that” or “which” and is normally used to introduce subordinate clauses, is occasionally used as a conjunction. One must be careful when considering the meanings of any connective word in the Tanakh.

End Notes

[A1] C.-L. Seow. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Revised Edition), Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, USA, 1995

[A2] The translations given here of Seow’s examples are ours rather than Seow’s. Our translations are using parentheses for scoping and, sometimes, Hebrew word order to better illustrate structure of the the original Hebrew. Also, when more than one translation is given for an example, the first is very literal, using only “and” for any γ , and the rest are better translations using the identified intended meanings for any γ .