



---

Waw Consecutive with the Perfect in Hebrew

Author(s): George Ricker Berry

Source: *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1903), pp. 60-69

Published by: The Society of Biblical Literature

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3268935>

Accessed: 08-08-2018 22:08 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*The Society of Biblical Literature* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Biblical Literature*

## Waw Consecutive with the Perfect in Hebrew.

PROF. GEORGE RICKER BERRY, PH.D.

HAMILTON, N. Y.

IN order that the position here taken with reference to waw consecutive with the perfect may be clearly understood, it is necessary that brief reference should be made to some other related matters, *viz.*, the general theory of the tenses, and the use of the imperfect with waw consecutive.

The prevailing theory of the Semitic tenses is that they express merely time-quality, not time-relation, that the imperfect expresses simply incomplete action, the perfect completed action. Yet there are not wanting adherents of the opposite view, such as König, who does not, to be sure, limit the meaning to time-relation, but makes that the principal idea (see his *Syntax*). The view of the writer is that the fundamental meaning of the Hebrew tenses, as of the Semitic tenses in general, is the expression of time-relation, that the Hebrew perfect expresses past action, the Hebrew imperfect future action. The participle is not a tense, and does not express relation, but quality, *i.e.* continuing action. The time-relation is most frequently the time in relation to the real time of the writer or speaker, but it may also be in relation to some other action, or in relation to some assumed standpoint of the writer or speaker. Much of what is to follow, however, would not be greatly affected by one's position on this fundamental question of tense meaning. The two views are very similar in their practical working out in details. The specific syntactical uses ordinarily given for perfect and imperfect without waw consecutive are accepted by the writer, although with some differences in the explanation of their origin, with the addition of a *limited* perfect of experience, along with the unlimited use generally recognized, which is sometimes to be translated by a present, more often by a past.

The waw consecutive with the imperfect is always distinguished from the waw conjunctive by a distinct form of the conjunction, from which fact result changes in tone and in vocalization of the verbal form, as is well known. There is, therefore, no danger in any

case of confusing the two forms. The meaning of the waw consecutive with the imperfect, in harmony with the view of the tenses given above, must be that it expresses a future idea relatively to some other action, expressed in the preceding verb, or other expression of time, whatever time this preceding phrase may express. Substantially the same explanation is given in different language by those who hold the view that the tenses express time-quality. The imperfect, therefore, retains its real force as fully with waw consecutive as without. The same force may be found without waw consecutive as with it, it is often the meaning of the so-called incipient imperfect of past time, but it is made clear and emphatic by the use of the waw consecutive. The form of the conjunction is probably simply the original form, with insertion of *dāghēš*-forte to preserve the full vowel. This form of the conjunction, therefore, is more emphatic than waw conjunctive, and serves to emphasize the connection with the preceding word or phrase, and thus to indicate that the tense idea of the form is to be taken in relation to the preceding word or phrase. Substantially the same use is found occasionally in Arabic, and probably also in Aramaic and Ethiopic, see especially Nöldeke.<sup>1</sup>

The waw consecutive with the perfect stands on a far different basis from that with the imperfect. The form of the conjunction does not differ from that of the waw conjunctive. The only difference is the change of tone, which is not in the conjunction but in the verb, and is carried out but imperfectly and inconsistently. There is probably no occurrence of it in other Semitic languages. It is commonly considered to be later in its origin than the use with the imperfect, and to be derived from that. The common explanation of its meaning makes it in its origin substantially a duplication of the waw consecutive with the imperfect, but in its usage entirely distinct. The only reasonable explanation, from the standpoint either of time-quality or time-relation, is that it expresses past action relatively to that of the preceding verb. By this explanation the perfect would retain its real force. But it is an explanation which, in most cases, cannot be reconciled with the facts. Most of these difficulties will be dealt with more fully in what follows. We come, then, to a consideration of the question whether there is really a waw consecutive with the perfect, or whether the cases which have been so classified are to be regarded simply as waw conjunctive.

<sup>1</sup> *Zur Grammatik des klassischen Arabisch*, p. 68 f.

Before directly considering this question, however, it is desirable to recall one feature which is regarded as very important by most writers on this matter. This may be stated in the words of Driver :<sup>2</sup> "Whatever, therefore, be the shade of meaning borne by the first or 'dominant' verb, the perfect following, inasmuch as the action it denotes is conceived to take place under the *same* conditions, assumes it too: be the dominant verb a jussive, frequentative, or subjunctive, the perfect is virtually the same." This should be kept in mind as an essential part of the usual view, although the presumption is against its correctness, inasmuch as it does not allow the perfect to retain its own real meaning. In connection with this should also be remembered the further statement of Driver :<sup>3</sup> "The consciousness of this relation [*i.e.* with a preceding occurrence] is to be conceived as essentially dependent upon union with *waw*." It is evidently a part of the fundamental conception, according to the common view, that the perfect should be directly connected with a preceding verb which governs its meaning.

I. ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF WAW CONSECUTIVE WITH THE PERFECT. — The most prominent of these are the following: —

1. The change of tone. This is the chief argument and the only one of much force. It is supposed to be the regular rule that in perfects with *waw* consecutive the tone is changed to the ultima, if not already there. This is the only external indication of the *waw* consecutive, and as such is chiefly relied upon to distinguish it from *waw* conjunctive. It is, however, an argument of very little force. In general it may be said, in the language of Driver<sup>4</sup> in a different connection: "Of course the accentuation, though it may indicate the sense in which a sentence was understood in 7–8 cent. A.D., does not determine the construction attached to it by the original author." Similar is the judgment of Prof. N. L. Margolis, Ph.D.:<sup>5</sup> "At best the accentuation is representative of traditional Jewish exegesis, which the student of the Bible is frequently forced to overrule." But much more than this may be said in the present case. There are of course many forms already accented on the ultima. Aside from these, it is probable that the tone remains unchanged quite as often as it is changed. There are many classes of cases in which it is usually or always unchanged. These are: when immediately followed by a tone syllable; when in pause; in the first

<sup>2</sup> *Hebrew Tenses*, § 108.

<sup>4</sup> *Hebrew Tenses*, § 121, Obs. 2, N.

<sup>3</sup> *Hebrew Tenses*, § 108.

<sup>5</sup> *Jewish Encyclopedia*, I, p. 157, *s.v.* "Accents."

person plural ; in the third feminine singular and third plural of the Hiph'il ; and in the Qāl of verbs לָאָה and לָהָה. Besides these there are classes of cases in which the usage is quite evenly divided between changing and not changing. These are the third feminine singular and third plural of the Qāl and Niph'al of verbs עָוָה and עָוָה. In a few isolated cases also the tone is not changed. Further, in a few cases the tone is changed when the perfect has no conjunction, in עָוָה verbs, as רָבִי, Ps. 69<sup>5</sup>, see Driver.<sup>6</sup> In the first two cases cited, when the perfect is immediately followed by a tone syllable, or is in pause, a reason can be seen for the variation in usage ; but in the other cases no reason appears. The facts thus point clearly to the conclusion given in Ges.-Kautsch :<sup>7</sup> "*Die Inkonzsequenz in der Betonung dieser Perfecta rührt offenbar daher, dass verschiedene Theorien (nicht allein die Ben Ashers) Eingang fanden.*" In other words, at the time of Ben Asher in the tenth century A.D., and after, the accentuation of these perfects was a matter on which there was no general agreement. Another curious fact in this connection is that this change of tone never occasions volatilization. The form with the usual tone is קָטַלְתִּי, the form with the changed tone is קָטַלְתִּי. It would accord with the usual practice to volatilize the changeable vowel two syllables before the tone, the one immediately before being unchangeable. Such a retention of a changeable vowel has its only analogy in a few exceptional forms, and forms governed by special considerations, not many in all. Taking this fact in connection with the facts about the accentuation just stated, the conclusion seems almost inevitable that the change of tone was a late development, not accepted early enough to occasion volatilization of the vowels, and not accepted with sufficient unanimity to cause it to be carried through consistently. In other words, the language knew nothing of this change of tone while it was really a living language, hence it can have no bearing on the question before us.

2. The analogy of the imperfect with waw consecutive. Doubtless, as a matter of history, this has had much to do with the growth and development of the belief in waw consecutive with the perfect ; yet of course an argument from analogy can never have more than a secondary force, so that this may be disregarded.

3. The difficulty of explaining many of the cases that occur on any other view. Later an attempt will be made to indicate in a

<sup>6</sup> *Hebrew Tenses*, § 132, N. 2.

<sup>7</sup> § 49 *l.*, N. 2.

general way how the cases can be explained on another view, so this argument may be left to be answered indirectly at that time.

4. The frequency with which some other verbal form, especially the imperfect, is followed by the perfect with *waw*, the so-called *waw* consecutive. This will be referred to later.

5. This explanation is substantially the one accepted by Jewish tradition for a long period of time. But this tradition is still so far removed in time from the Old Testament, that it can have no more value than any other comparatively modern opinion in reference to its meaning.

## II. ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE EXISTENCE OF WAW CONSECUTIVE WITH THE PERFECT.

1. There are many cases in which the explanation as *waw* consecutive is unnatural and forced. If these were few, their value as evidence would be very little, for a few peculiar cases may doubtless be found in reference to any syntactical rule in Hebrew. But, in fact, there are very many of them, in several classes.

*a)* There are many cases without a preceding verb or any phrase with which the *waw* consecutive can connect itself. The reference here is not to cases in which the *waw* stands at the beginning of a paragraph. In these cases it might perhaps be said that the occurrence of the conjunction itself is a difficulty, and that whatever explanation is given of that would also explain the consecutive use. But the cases meant are those in which a verb or other phrase expressing time does precede, but one which is inappropriate, to which, in the nature of the case, a consecutive use cannot be united. Thus the verb preceding is often a past or present, while the perfect, with so-called *waw* consecutive, following, has a future force, as in Gen. 26<sup>22</sup> 1 K. 2<sup>44</sup>. A few similar cases occur with the *waw* consecutive with the imperfect, which must be regarded as very anomalous. But the cases are very much more numerous with the perfect, and they show the same general range of meanings as when an appropriate verb precedes, so that they constitute an objection to the common view of very great weight. For the whole force of the construction, it is often urged, depends directly upon the *waw*, which, by its connection with the preceding verb, gives to the perfect the precise syntactical force of that verb. The *waw* in such cases, then, is designed to connect the perfect to another word which shall act as a guide to its meaning, when indeed the guide is absent.

*b)* Cases in which the perfect with *waw* consecutive, so-called, is

preceded by another perfect. These cases also are very numerous. The perfect is usually either one which refers to past time, or is a perfect of certainty, including the prophetic perfect. Here the natural explanation would be that the conjunction is waw conjunctive, and the perfect has the same syntactical force as the preceding perfect. It is certainly very unnatural to regard the conjunction as waw consecutive, and explain its use by saying that the preceding perfect has a force which is equivalent to an imperfect, and then the perfect with waw consecutive has the same force as the preceding perfect, not because it is a perfect, but because it is the equivalent of an imperfect. This explanation is regularly given, however, when the preceding verb is a prophetic perfect, which is considered equivalent to the future imperfect. On the other hand, when the perfect with waw is preceded by a perfect in the realm of the past, it is claimed, as *e.g.* by Driver,<sup>8</sup> that the perfect with waw consecutive expresses frequentative action, but the preceding perfect does not. This is manifestly a pure assumption, and contrary to all the indications. Here is an obvious dilemma, either the preceding perfect has a frequentative force, or the following perfect with waw has not the syntactical force of the preceding verb, either horn of which would seem to be fatal to the view that the conjunction is waw consecutive in these cases. How could there be any clearer indication of repetition in connection with the perfect in such a case than, *e.g.*, in 2 Chr. 12<sup>11</sup>, where **בָּאֵר** expresses repetition as clearly as **וַיִּשְׁאוּם** and **וַיְהַשְׁבוּם**?

c) Cases in which the so-called perfect with waw consecutive is preceded or followed by the imperfect with waw consecutive, usually in the realm of the past. It is ordinarily difficult to perceive much difference of meaning in the two forms of expression. The imperfect with waw consecutive is regarded by most as expressing a simple fact, but the perfect with waw consecutive as expressing a frequentative idea. If this be the explanation, the old term waw conversive is more appropriate with these perfects than waw consecutive, for there is no *consecutive* force. It is certainly much more natural to regard the imperfect with waw consecutive as having its usual force, while the perfect, with waw conjunctive, simply expresses past time.

2. There are many other cases in which the explanation as waw consecutive, while not as unnatural as in those already mentioned, is yet much less natural than the explanation as waw conjunctive.

<sup>8</sup> *Hebrew Tenses*, § 114.

a) Cases in which the perfect with so-called waw consecutive is preceded by an expression of past time not a perfect. What was said above about such a perfect when preceded by a perfect will apply here, although with somewhat diminished force. Many of these preceding expressions are frequentative imperfects. If the perfect has waw conjunctive, then the perfect must have a frequentative force, *i.e.* it is the limited perfect of experience already referred to. A few words more may be added concerning this usage. Driver denies that the perfect can have such a meaning. He says:<sup>9</sup> "The fact that it [the bare perfect] may be used to *narrate* recurrent events (grouping them as one) is no more a proof that it *expresses* their recurrency than the use of the aorist in, *e.g.* Hdt. 5, 92, 21 . . . can shew that it bears there the sense of the imperfect." But this is a distinction with no real difference. The imperfect as well as the perfect strictly *narrates* rather than *expresses* recurrent action; the frequentative meaning is, on any view, derived; it is really an implied meaning. And as the perfect in Hebrew may come to narrate a general truth without limitations, the perfect of experience, there is no reason why it should not also narrate a customary action with some limitations, in past or present time, a limited perfect of experience, just as the imperfect has a limited and an unlimited frequentative use. It is interesting to note that, while the gnomic aorist of the Greek expresses a general truth, like the Hebrew perfect of experience, the aorist also, as well as the imperfect, with *ἄν*, expresses an action that is simply customary.<sup>10</sup>

b) Cases in which the perfect with so-called waw consecutive is preceded by an imperfect of present time. Here it may naturally have its own use as a perfect of experience. There is no reason why the perfect in these cases should not be used as the practical equivalent of the frequentative imperfect, although actually approaching the matter from a different standpoint, inasmuch as the two constructions are often found in parallel relations without the waw.

3. There are many cases in which the perfect with so-called waw consecutive has not the precise syntactical force of the preceding verb. Some classes of these cases have already been indicated. Other individual cases are numerous. Most striking are cases in which an imperative is followed by more than one perfect with waw, the perfect with waw in one or more cases expressing an imperative idea, and in other cases not, as in Gen. 27<sup>43-45</sup> 45<sup>9-11</sup> Ex. 3<sup>16, 18</sup> Jer. 7<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> *Hebrew Tenses*, § 133, N.

<sup>10</sup> Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, § 1296.



In Gen. 45<sup>9-11</sup>, *e.g.*, an imperative comes first at the end of <sup>9</sup> וְרָדָה, followed by a jussive, תִּנְצֵמֶד, with אֵל. The two perfects with waw in <sup>10</sup> may be imperative in force. But at the beginning of <sup>11</sup> וְכַלְפֵּלְתִּי is plainly only a future in force, not an imperative. A different case is Jer. 7<sup>23</sup>, where the imperative שָׁמְעוּ is followed by a perfect with waw, וְהָיִיתִי, with a future meaning, with which the imperfect הִתְהַוִּי is coördinate, and then by a perfect with waw, וְהִלַּכְתֶּם, with an imperative meaning.

4. All the meanings assigned to the perfect with waw consecutive the perfect without waw has, as already indicated with reference to most of them. Some are of course more frequent than others, but in general all are common. There are no cases, therefore, in which the explanation as waw consecutive is the only admissible one.

III. THE CONCLUSION. — It appears from what has been said that there are great difficulties in the common view concerning the perfect with waw consecutive. The only conclusion to which the writer can come, after endeavoring to give due weight to all the arguments that have been mentioned, is that there is no waw consecutive with the perfect, but that all the cases which are usually so classed are to be regarded as cases of waw conjunctive; in other words, the perfect has in every such case some one of the regular syntactical uses of the perfect. The evidence might seem at first to point to a different conclusion, that there is a waw consecutive with the perfect, although with much narrower limits than is commonly believed. It has been indicated that the difficulties with waw consecutive are much greater in some cases than in others. Why is it not, then, a natural conclusion that these cases of greatest difficulty are to be regarded as waw conjunctive, but the others as waw consecutive? But the only cases in which the explanation as waw consecutive would be at all natural are those in which the perfect with waw expresses that which is past *relatively* to the preceding verb. This is the usage which, as above indicated, is parallel to the use of the imperfect with waw consecutive. It might seem, therefore, that the term waw consecutive should be used in such cases. A sufficient reason for not doing so, however, is to be found in the fact, according to the view of the writer, that the number of cases of such usage is comparatively small. It may also be remarked that the conjunction has nothing directly to do with the usage, for it is not changed in form at all in these cases, and parallel cases are often found without waw. The relation to the preceding verb is therefore indicated by the context, not by waw.

These cases can usually be included under a pluperfect or future perfect usage.

What the particular syntactical force is has already been indicated in some classes of cases. In cases not previously covered, probably the most common use is the perfect of certainty, including the prophetic perfect. These terms are here used for convenience, as the common ones. The force of much that König<sup>11</sup> says about the usage is recognized, in particular the importance of the emphasis which he places upon the subjective explanation in many passages, as contrasted with the common objective view. If it be objected that the explanation here given will make the perfect of certainty very common, it may be answered that it occurs very frequently without *waw*, no reason appears why it should not also occur frequently with *waw*. The so-called *waw* consecutive with the perfect is especially common in poetic and prophetic passages, where also the perfect of certainty appears with frequency. It may perhaps be thought that the perfect with *waw* after an imperative or jussive affords the greatest difficulty on the view here presented. Yet many of these cases give difficulty on the ordinary view, although it is not always recognized. Generally the perfect in such cases is to be regarded as a perfect of certainty. It is really no more surprising that this perfect should be found in such connections than that the imperfect so often has an imperative force, as the future does in English. Here also the same usage is found of the perfect without *waw*, although by no means as frequently. Some examples are Gen. 40<sup>14</sup> Ps. 22<sup>22</sup> Job 22<sup>18</sup>. Gen. 40<sup>14</sup> is particularly strong. Here **כִּי אִם־זָכַרְתִּי** can hardly mean anything else than "But remember thou me," and the perfect is followed by other perfects with *waw* with similar meanings. These and other examples are instances of what is often called the precative perfect, which Driver<sup>12</sup> rightly recognizes, if it be a reality, as only one form of the perfect of certainty.

It is also interesting to note that the imperative and jussive are often followed by the same forms, instead of the perfect with *waw*. The general distinction will probably hold that these forms express more strongly the idea of command or desire; while the perfect with *waw* has much of a future idea, with some imperative force, in other words, a meaning similar to the general use of the perfect of certainty.

It need occasion no surprise, of course, that a perfect with *waw* very often does not express the full force of the preceding verb, or

<sup>11</sup> *Syntax der hebräischen Sprache*, §§ 129-134.      <sup>12</sup> *Hebrew Tenses*, § 20.

its precise shade of meaning. It would frequently not be necessary that it should do so. Besides the case of a preceding imperative, which has just been mentioned, special mention should perhaps here be made of cases in which the preceding verb is said to have a modal force, especially after conjunctions. These cases might seem to present some difficulty. In reference to such cases, it is generally claimed that the imperfect can express modal force, the perfect can not. But the imperfect does not *express* modal force, it is only *implied* in the context. It may be and is implied with the perfect as well as with the imperfect, but, naturally from the meaning of the tense, this does not take place as often as with the imperfect. In the cases under discussion, then, the modal force is implied both in connection with the imperfect and with the following perfect.

It may yet be asked if it is not strange, on the view here presented, that an imperfect should, as a matter of fact, so often be followed by a perfect with waw. Sometimes this is because the perfect brings out an idea which needed to be expressed, which could not be expressed as well in any other way. At other times this may be explained as due to a desire for variety in expression, so generally recognized and so puzzling, which is marked in the poets and prophets, where the usage before us is especially common. The fact that the imperfect is used so frequently, because of its use with waw consecutive, makes it natural that the perfect should be used, for the sake of variety, in many cases where the imperfect might have been used. The intermingling of the two also produces variety. The perfect without waw often intermingles in the same way with the simple imperfect, which also is probably partly due to a desire for variety.

It would appear, then, that the difficulties in the use of the perfect with waw, on the view presented, are no greater than in its use without waw, and are usually parallel in the two forms of expression. The usage without waw, therefore, justifies and explains the usage with waw.