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Del Barco’s main concern is with the four verb forms to which he devotes a chapter each: weqatal, wayyiqtol, qatal, and yiqtol. Like many recent discourse-based models, del Barco views the waw-prefixed forms (weqatal and wayyiqtol) as distinct from the other pair of forms in that they usually occur in verbal chains denoting sequentiality or temporal succession. Thus, he looks first at chains of weqatal and wayyiqtol and then deals with the handful of individual instances of these forms in the data. Del Barco states that chains of weqatal occur in predictive discourse with future time reference and in descriptive types of discourse (e.g., lament) without an explicit temporal reference (p. 89). The form occurs alone (i.e., not in a chain) in predictive discourse, most often following yiqtol (p. 97). Chains of wayyiqtol occur less frequently in the database. Most often they are headed by a qatal verb, and together form a brief narrative sequence (p. 126).

Unlike the waw-prefixed forms, qatal and yiqtol may appear in a variety of positions in the clause. Thus, del Barco organizes his discussion of these two forms syntactically—whether they appear initially in the clause, or are preceded by waw conjunction, by a particle, or by another constituent. Del

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Barco observes that qatal occurs in three syntactic contexts: by itself (with anterior or perfect meaning), with waw conjunction (a rare occurrence), and following a variety of subordinating conjunctions (p. 158). Yiqtol occurs at the beginning of the clause with three different functions: as a modal form, as the antecedent to a chain of weqatal forms, and in one half of a protasis-apodosis construction or parallel bicola (pp. 194–195). Yiqtol prefixed with waw shows a close connection with what precedes or expresses a jussive sense, and the form also follows various subordinating conjunctions (p. 195).

Del Barco presents a wealth of statistical detail regarding the verb forms in pre-exilic minor prophets. He also breaks new ground by examining largely poetic prophetic books rather than prose narrative, as in most previous studies. Del Barco begins his concluding chapter optimistically, with the claim that his study has shown that the syntactic analysis of the Hebrew verbs is an integral part of grammatical analysis and leads to a better understanding of the biblical text (p. 219). Further, he reiterates that the failure of traditional sentence-based approaches to the verbal system justifies his discourse approach, and that in contrast to the numerous exceptional examples that sentence-based semantic theories are unable to handle, his own discourse approach can explain them (p. 220).

Unfortunately, a closer look at del Barco’s study belies his optimistic claim. First, he has not really “explained” the verb system, but merely presented a taxonomy of syntactic and discourse contexts in which each verb form appears. The question of why specific verb forms are compatible with particular contexts (e.g., weqatal and predictive discourse) is left unanswered. To the degree that del Barco does take a position on such traditional semantic questions, his conclusions are similar to those found in traditional grammars (e.g., wayyiqtol appears in narrative discourse with a past tense meaning, qatal often has a perfect sense), which casts doubt on the advantages of his discourse theory vis-à-vis the treatments found in the standard grammars.

Second, del Barco’s discourse approach has difficulty with passages that traditional grammars easily explain. Most notably, del Barco discusses Amos 4:7–8 as “un caso atípico” (an atypical case), in which a series of weqatal and yiqtol forms is found in the middle of a past tense narrative discourse using qatal and wayyiqtol forms (cf. verses 6, 9–11). Based on his prior findings that chains of weqatal appear in predictive discourse, he claims that these two verses must be understood as a future tense, predictive discourse in the middle of a past narrative discourse (pp. 88–89). In contrast to del Barco’s treatment of these verses as atypical, Waltke and O’Connor correctly explain the verbs in these verses as expressing past “customary,” action that is “epexegetical to a situation represented by qatl in the leading clause.” (B. K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990], pp. 533–534).
Finally, del Barco’s claim that the position of the verb in the clause is determinative of its meaning (a view he shares with other discourse theorists, such as Niccacci) appears dubious (p. 159). For instance, he claims that a perfect (aspect) meaning is distinctive of the zero-qatal construction (i.e., clause initial qatal) (p. 158). However, the fact that qatal is clause initial appears to have nothing to do with the perfect meaning of the verb since examples may be found in del Barco’s database in which a non-clause initial qatal also has a perfect sense. Most notable is הָעֲשָׂה in Amos 5:11, which del Barco correctly translates with a (subjunctive) perfect sense “aunque hayáis plantado” (although you have planted) (p. 157).

Del Barco’s study provides important data for further research on the Hebrew verb, and he has rightfully challenged scholars to move beyond the comfortable domain of prose narrative. However, del Barco’s study exemplifies the difficulties associated with discourse studies of the Hebrew verb in general. Namely, without a semantic component (the traditional grammar approach) discourse observations remain just that, observations and not explanations. Explanations require serious attention to the symbiotic relationship between verbal semantics and discourse contexts. Semantic and discourse approaches should not be presented as mutually exclusive options, but as complementary approaches whose explanatory powers mutually enrich each other.

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This is a revision of a 1993 Ph.D. dissertation completed at the Toronto School of Theology under the supervision of Brian Peckham. His influence is obvious and substantial at several key points, and Wood acknowledges this debt. For example, the origin of prophecy within the poetic tradition, the nature of the redaction of the prophetic books, and their literary analysis and dating find their source in Peckham’s work (cf. History and Prophecy: The Development of Late Judean Literary Traditions [ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1993]. He mentions this dissertation in a footnote on p. 222.). The foundational idea for the argument of the book is that Israelite prophecy began in the performing arts. The author’s goal is to demonstrate how the material that Amos wrote for live public performance was completely revised