The term "bāl appears eleven times in Biblical Hebrew. It always heads a declarative sentence and, except for two examples, occurs in reported speech. Conventionally, its meaning splits according to the linguistic period in which a particular token is attested: in earlier texts, "bāl is an asseverative ('verily, of a truth' [BDB]); in late texts, it is an adversative ('howbeit, but' [BDB]). Kilwing further argues that "bāl can serve a responsive function, especially when the ensuing speech has a corrective force.

This paper will expand upon Kilwing's argument and will show that, regardless of historical period, Biblical Hebrew "bāl is a discourse marker that serves three roles. First, it serves an organizational role. Occurring precisely at moments when strict discourse expectations are upset, "bāl signals that the following discourse will nonetheless be contextually coherent. Second, it serves an informational role. "bāl introduces assertions. Third, it serves a pragmatic role. "bāl is cooperative and affiliative; it can register sympathy with an addressee, elicit sympathy from an addressee, offer an apologetic concession, or respond sympathetically to (the implications of) a potentially disturbing situation. A rough English translation of "bāl, then, is 'well'.