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# GENESIS 1:14—TRANSLATION NOTES

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The purpose of these notes is twofold: first, to evaluate John H. Sailhamer's argument that Gen 1:14 does not place the creation of the heavenly lights on the fourth day of Creation; and second, to determine whether the term מועדים ("appointed times") in Gen 1:14 is used to designate annual sacred times or particular rhythms of the natural cycle.

## *Genesis 1:14 and the Creation of the Lights*

According to Sailhamer:

> When the syntax of [Gen 1] v. 14 is compared to that of the creation of the expanse in v. 6, the two verses have quite a different sense. The syntax of v. 6 suggests that when God said, "Let there be an expanse," he was, in fact, creating an expanse where there was none previously ("creation out of nothing"). So clearly the author intended to say that God created the expanse on the first day. In v. 14, however, the syntax is different, though the translations are often similar in English. In v. 14 God does not say, "Let there be lights . . . to separate," as if there were no lights before this command and afterward the lights were created. Rather the Hebrew text reads, "And God said, 'Let the lights in the expanse of the sky separate.'" In other words, unlike the syntax of v. 6, in v. 14 God's command assumes that the lights were already in the expanse and that in response to his command they were given a purpose, "to separate the day from the night" and "to mark seasons and days and years." If the difference between the syntax of v. 6 (the use of *hāyāh* alone) and v. 14 (the use of *hāyāh* + ל infinitive; cf. GKC, 114h) is significant, then it suggests that the author did not understand his account of the fourth day as an account of the creation of the lights; but, on the contrary, the narrative assumes that the heavenly lights have been created already "in the beginning."[1]

Sailhamer here makes three unstated assumptions. First, he assumes that the noun מאורת is definite ("*the* lights"), even though it has no article. Second, he assumes that the relationship between the locative phrase ברקיע השמים ("in the expanse of the sky") and the noun מארת is attributive rather predicative. Third, he assumes that the infinitive להבדיל ("to divide") primarily qualifies the copula jussive of היה rather the noun מאורת.[2]

As for the first assumption, nouns with unique referents are often definite

[1]John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:34, ellipsis and parenthetical text original; see also idem, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 93.

[2]For an example of a list of infinitives qualifying nouns rather than verbs, see Eccl 3:1-9.

in meaning, even when they don't have an article.[3] Sailhamer may thus be correct, but his case remains unproved. Likewise with the second and third assumptions, the best that can be said is that Sailhamer has raised some interesting possibilities, but has not established them with any degree of certainty.

The position taken in these notes is that Sailhamer is correct, although for two reasons he does not consider. First, the sentence under discussion introduces a semipoetic pattern that continues throughout Gen 1:14-15, with the next two sentences continuing the discussion of the lights, each beginning with the copula היה[4] and containing at least one *lamed* prepositional phrase. In both of these subsequent sentences, the first *lamed* used clearly introduces the complement of the subject. The burden of proof is thus upon those who want to argue that the case should be any different in Gen 1:14a. Second, the *lamed* is used before the noun אתת ("signs") in Gen 1:14b and before the expression מאורת ברקיע השמים ("lights in the expanse of the sky") in Gen 1:15a as a "*lamed* of purpose," which usually includes the idea of a changed status or form.[5] The idea would thus be that of "the lights in the expanse of the sky" *becoming* "signs" and *becoming* "lights in the expanse of the sky *to light up the earth*," rather than coming into existence on the fourth day.[6]

### *The* מועדים *("Appointed Times") of Genesis 1:14*

The noun מועד is a cognate accusative of the verb יעד, of which one definition is to "appoint a time, a place."[7] Thus, it is not surprising that מועד should be variously defined as an "appointed time, place, [or] meeting,"[8] although in Gen 1:14 the word מועדים clearly signifies "appointed times."

The term מועד is frequently used as a technical term for an annual festival (e.g., Lev 23; Num 28–29). Accordingly, it is no surprise that a number of scholars have interpreted the word מועדים in Gen 1:14 as a reference to annual sacred times.[9] However, the term is frequently used as a designation for other

[3]Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 250.

[4]Both these clauses begin with *waw* consecutive perfect forms of היה, but this form frequently continues the sense of an initial imperative, cohortative, or jussive (Waltke and O'Connor, 530); see also E. Kautsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, trans. A. E. Cowley, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 333.

[5]Waltke and O'Connor, 209.

[6]Indeed, if the latter were the idea meant, one wouldn't even expect the preposition *lamed* to appear before these nouns.

[7]Ludwig H. Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 388, citing 2 Sam 20:5; Isa 47:7.

[8]Jay P. Green, ed., *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979), 417.

[9]For instance, Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 30, 31; Solomon Gdanz, "The Calendar of Ancient Israel," in *Homenaje a Millás-Vallicrosa* (Barcelona: Consejo Superiore

specified times,[10] including cyclical rhythms of nature, such as the migration of birds.[11] The question thus arises whether the context of Gen 1:14 indicates the same exact nuance.

James B. Jordan defines מועדים (Gen 1:14) in terms of his understanding of the preceding term, אתת ("signs"). He argues that the use of אתת points to "the primary Spiritual light of God's glory," and concludes that "we are led . . . to take the next term, 'seasons,' in context as related to the special signs, and as referring primarily to appointed times of worship."[12] Obviously, he assumes that "the primary Spiritual light of God's glory" can be seen far more clearly in the appointment of special times of worship than in the appointment of the cycles of nature. However, this assumption betrays a non-Hebraic dichotomy between nature and grace, one which he himself decries.[13] The "signs" of Gen 1:14 can also be understood as ordering principles and guides for the cosmos rather than as signs of God's glory per se.[14]

In his comments on Gen 1:14, E. A. Speiser notes that "the sun and the moon cannot be said to determine the seasons proper; moreover, the order would then be unbalanced (one would expect: days, seasons, years)."[15] He therefore argues that the phrases לאתת ("for signs") and למועדים ("for appointed times") form a hendiadys, that the copulative between למועדים and לימים ("for days") is explicative, and that the copulative between לימים and שנים ("years") is connective,[16] as reflected in his translation of Gen 1:14b: "Let them [the lights]

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de Investigaciones Científicas, 1954), 1:645; Paul Beauchamp, *Création et séparation: Étude exégétique du chapitre premier de la Genèse*, Bibliothèque de sciences religieuses (Aubier Montaigne: Éditions du Cerf, 1969), 114; Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1-11* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 21; G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco: Word, 1987), 23; David J. Rudolph, "Festivals in Gen 1:14," *TynBul* 54/2 (2003): 23-40. Koehler and Baumgartner, 504, also classify the use of מועדים in Gen 1:14 under the heading "*festgesetze Zeiten, Festzeiten*, appointed dates, seasons of feast."

[10]E.g., the word מועד is used of the designated time for a plague to fall (Exod 9:5; 2 Sam 24:15) and the designated time for offering sacrifices, including the daily sacrifice (Num 28:2-8). It is also used of prearranged meeting times (1 Sam 13:8, 11; 20:35), the times allocated for the completion of a task (2 Sam 20:5), an extended period of danger (Jer 46:17), and the designated time for the fulfillment of a prophetic vision (Hab 2:13); see George V. Wigram, *The New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance: Coded to Strong's Concordance Numbering System*, rev. ed., ed. Jay P. Green (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 672, 673.

[11]E.g., in Jer 8:7. See C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin, Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 1:57.

[12]James B. Jordan, *Christianity and the Calendar: A Syllabus* (Niceville, FL: Biblical Horizons, 1988), 81.

[13]Ibid., 79.

[14]E.g., see Shimon Bakon, "Sign—אות," *Dor ledor* 18 (1990): 241.

[15]E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 6.

[16]Ibid. That the copulative between "days" and the "years" is connective is

mark the fixed times, the days and the years."[17]

Speiser does not address the question of whether the word מועדים in Gen 1:14 refers to annual sacred times. It might be argued that the sun and the moon do determine the time of their observance. However, the order would remain as unbalanced (one would still expect days, מועדים, years). Accordingly, this possibility does nothing to negate his suggestion that the relationships between signs, מועדים, days, and years be respectively understood in terms of hendiadys, explication, and connection.

There seems to be good reason for adopting Speiser's view of the relationships between the different parts of Gen 1:14b. It is significant for our discussion that, in this case, the מועדים in Gen 1:14 are defined as "days and years" rather than as מקראי קדש ("holy convocations/ proclamations of holiness"), as in Lev 23:37.[18] In context, these days are the successive 24-hour days of the natural cycle, each one ruled in part by the "lesser light," the moon, and in part ruled by the "greater light," the sun, just as each of the six days of Gen 1 is comprised of an evening and a morning. It is appropriate that the מועדים should also be defined as "years," since the circadian and annual cycles are the dominant rhythms of the natural world. On the other hand, the year-long sacred times of the Sabbatical Year and the Jubilee are never designated as מועדים in the OT. In support of this conclusion, it should be noted that the LXX translates מועדים as καιρούς ("times") in Gen 1:14 and as καιρὸν ("time") in Jer 8:7, rather than as ἑορται ("festivals") as in Lev 23:37.

*Conclusion*

Sailhamer contends that according to Gen 1:14, "the lights in the expanse of the sky" exist before the fourth day of Creation week, but assume a new purpose at this time. Substantial evidence for this position exists in two facts. First, the pattern of the use of the copula and the *lamed* preposition in Gen 1:14a, 15, suggests that the *lamed* infinitive phrase להבריל ("to divide") in Gen 1:14a should be taken as directly qualifying the copula rather than the subject of the sentence. Second, the *lamed* is used before the noun אתת ("signs") in Gen 1:14b and before the expression מאורת ברקיע השמים ("lights in the expanse of the sky") in Gen 1:15a as a "*lamed* of purpose," suggesting that the lights are simply becoming something new, rather than coming into existence for the first time.

The מועדים of Gen 1:14 have often been identified as the annual sacred times rather than as the cyclical rhythms of nature. Semantically, the position is ambiguous. However, syntactically, a strong case exists for defining the מועדים

supported by the absence of the preposition *lamed* before שנים. Contra Rudolph, 33, the four nouns here should not simply be seen as an undifferentiated "string of pearls."

[17]Ibid., 3, 4. Patrick Wilton, "More Cases of Waw Explicativum," *VT* 44 (1994): 125-128.

[18]In favor of translating מקראי קדש as "proclamations of holiness" rather than "holy convocations," see Ernst Kutsch, "א," *ZAW* 65 (1953): 247-253.

as the days and years of the natural cycle, rather than as special times of worship.

The translation of Gen 1:14 here proposed would be as follows: "And God said, 'Let the lights in the expanse of the sky be for dividing the day and the night and let them be signs of appointed times, (that is) of days and years.'"