FESTIVALS IN GENESIS 1:14

David J. Rudolph

Summary
The study presents a case for translating מִדְיָּא in Genesis 1:14 as ‘festivals’ or ‘festivals and seasons’. After surveying the growing support for this rendering in biblical scholarship, the article considers the evidence of usage, literary context, ANE background, and Second Temple Jewish literature.

I. Introduction

The goal of this essay is to demonstrate that a reasonable case can be made for translating מִדְיָּא in Genesis 1:14 as ‘festivals’ or ‘festivals and seasons’. Support for the rendering is found in modern English translations (e.g. GNB, NJB, NEB, REB). In addition, an increasing number of non-English translations have adopted the ‘festivals’/
‘festivals and seasons’ rendering, following recommendations in the 1997 United Bible Society Translation Handbook.3

Standard lexicons and theological dictionaries support the ‘festivals’ rendering, including Koehler-Baumgartner, Holladay, BDB, TWOT, and TDOT.4 Koch notes:

The fixed seasons in the course of the year are at the same time the fixed times of festivals. Though the moon plays an especially decisive role, the sun is also of consequence: ‘He made the moon for the יומי, the sun knows its (time for) rising’ (Ps. 104:19). A similar sense is expressed by the famous passage Gen. 1:14, according to which the celestial bodies were created to be ‘for signs and for (regular) times of festivals and for days and years’ (cf. Sir. 43:7). 1QS 9:26–10:8 extensively discusses the relationship between the natural and cultic year from the perspective of יומי.5

Over the past 130 years, a number of commentators have favoured ‘festivals’ as the most accurate translation of יומי in Genesis 1:14.6 In line with this trend, John Skinner wrote in his 1910 International Critical Commentary on Genesis:

יומי (seasons) appears never (certainly not in P) to be used of the natural seasons of the year (Ho. 2.11, Jer. 8.7 are figurative), but always of a time conventionally agreed upon (see Ex. 9.5), or fixed by some circumstance. The commonest application is to the Sacred seasons of the ecclesiastical year, which are fixed by the moon (cf. Ps. 104.19). If the natural seasons are excluded, this seems the only possible sense here; and P’s predilection for matters of cultus makes the explanation plausible.7

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5 Koch, בִּימֹים, 170.
Lang, Davidson, Gowan, Scullion, Brodie, Towner, and Walton maintain this position. Among Rabbinc commentators, Rashi supports the ‘festivals’ translation. The expanded ‘festivals and seasons’ rendering, which emphasizes the central role of harvest festivals in Israel’s calendar (a direct link to the natural ‘seasons’), is supported by Wenham, Kidner, Hartley, Driver, Westermann, Bush, Alford, Spurrell, Leupold, and Fretheim.

Several recent studies on Israel’s calendar also uphold the ‘festivals’ translation. James VanderKam raises the issue of מָדְיָם in Genesis 1:14 on page one of his book *Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, noting:

The term translated ‘seasons’ (מָדְיָם) is one that elsewhere in the Bible means ‘festivals’. Therefore, one could say that in this paragraph the sun and moon are given calendrical assignments for three of the entities that are significant in Biblical and post-Biblical calendars – days, years and festivals.

Roger Beckwith addresses Genesis 1:14 in *Calendar and Chronology, Jewish and Christian*:

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...when the lunar calendar appears in the Old Testament, it is often precisely in priestly, or cultic, contexts that it does so. Thus, it is hard to believe that Gen. 1:14–16 and Ps. 104:19 are referring simply to secular ‘seasons’.

Finally, Walter Vogels’ SBL paper on ‘The Cultic and Civil Calendars of the Fourth Day of Creation (Gen 1,14b)’, the most comprehensive study of מַלְאִיָּהָ in Genesis 1:14 to date, assesses the translation background and placement of מַלְאִיָּהָ in the literary context of the creation account. Vogels concludes that ‘festivals’ is the most accurate translation of מַלְאִיָּהָ in Genesis 1.

II. Survey of Usage Distribution

There are 160 instances of the use of מַלְאִיָּהָ in the Torah. The usage distribution is as follows:

a) Tent of Meeting

The expression ‘[Tent of] Meeting’ (מוֹזִיא לַהֲדוֹת) occurs 135 times in the Torah, eighty-four percent of all instances of מַלְאִיָּהָ. It is unlikely that מַלְאִיָּהָ in Genesis 1:14 refers directly to the Tent of Meeting for the following reasons: (1) מוֹזִיא is a fixed form demarcated by the construct noun לַהֲדוֹת. The absence of the construct noun in Genesis 1:14 suggests that the Tent of Meeting is not at issue; (2) The reference to ‘days’ and ‘years’ subsequent to מַלְאִיָּהָ in Genesis 1:14 implies that appointed time is the emphasis rather than appointed place; (3)

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The plural noun מֶשֶׁרְתָּה in Genesis 1:14 is incongruous with the emphatically singular nature of the מֶשֶׁרְתֶּיהָ in the Torah.13

b) Assembly/Set Time for an Act of God

מֶשֶׁרְתָּה refers to an ‘assembly [of Israel]’ once in the Torah (Nu. 16:2) and to a ‘set time for an act of God’ (Gn. 17:21; 18:14; 21:2; Ex. 9:5) four times. In all five of these passages, מֶשֶׁרְתָּה has no direct linkage to the sun, moon or stars (three vital context elements in Gn. 1:14), thus suggesting incompatibility. In Genesis 1:14, מֶשֶׁרְתָּה are a main purpose of the heavenly lights.

c) Time of Offerings, Primarily for Festivals

מֶשֶׁרְתָּה occurs once in the Torah in the context of an inclusio that emphasizes festival offerings (Nu. 28:2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>מֶשֶׁרְתָּה (at its appointed time)</th>
<th>Numbers 28:2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Numbers 28:3–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shabbat</td>
<td>Numbers 28:9–10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosh Chodesh</td>
<td>Numbers 28:11–15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pesach</td>
<td>Numbers 28:16–25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shavuot</td>
<td>Numbers 28:26–31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yom Teruah</td>
<td>Numbers 29:1–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yom Kippur</td>
<td>Numbers 29:7–11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sukkot</td>
<td>Numbers 29:12–38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מֶשֶׁרְתָּה (at your appointed festivals)</td>
<td>Numbers 29:39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Numbers 28:2 use of מֶשֶׁרְתָּה is compatible with the meaning of מֶשֶׁרְתָּה in Genesis 1:14 since ‘festival offerings’ are directly regulated by the sun, moon and stars, and could not exist without these luminaries. This having been said, ‘festivals’/‘festivals and seasons’ may be a preferred translation because festival offerings (some of which are dependent on the agricultural cycle and the natural seasons) are a sub-category of festival observances, a point reinforced by the use of מֶשֶׁרְתָּה (‘at your appointed festivals’) in Numbers 29:39 at the end of the inclusio.

13 See Menahem Haran, Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1985), ch. xiv: ‘The Non-Priestly Image of the Tent of mô'ēḏ’. A late text that hints at linkage is 4Q320, which identifies the starting point of the mishmarot (priestly courses) of 1 Chronicles 24:7–18 with the fourth day of creation (VanderKam, Calendars, 79).
d) Time of Commemorating Pesach

חַגְּדָנָה refers to the ‘time of commemorating Pesach’ once in the Torah (Dt. 16:6). Pesach occurs on a full moon at the beginning of Israel’s calendar year. The sun and stars also regulate the timing of Pesach, which coincides with a harvest festival in the first month (Lv. 23:9–14) and begins at a particular time of day, twilight. Given this dependence on sun, moon and stars, Pesach would seem to be compatible with the meaning of המַעֲנֵי in Genesis 1:14. However, as with the ‘time of festival offerings’, the ‘time of commemorating Pesach’ is probably too narrow an interpretation of המַעֲנֵי to fit the Genesis 1 context since Pesach is the first festival of an annual cycle of festivals. The more inclusive term ‘festivals’/‘festivals and seasons’ is therefore to be preferred in Genesis 1:14.

e) Appointed Time of a Festival

חַגְּדָנָה entails the meaning ‘appointed time of a festival’ nine times in the Torah;14 references are to the full festival cycle, Pesach, Matzot and Sukkot (Ex. 13:10; 23:15; 34:18; Lv. 23:4; Nu. 9:2, 3, 7, 13; Dt. 31:10). Notably, all three of the latter festivals are dramatically linked to the heavenly lights since they fall on full moons. This broad and graphic identification of חַגְּדָנָה with Israel’s festival cycle, an institution established by divine decree and regulated by heavenly lights, serves to buttress the case that המַעֲנֵי in Genesis 1:14 refers to Israel’s festivals. The next section will attempt to advance this argument further.

f) Festivals

חַגְּדָנָה explicitly means festivals eight times in the Torah (Lv. 23:2 [2×], 4, 37, 44; Nu. 10:10; 15:3; 29:39). All eight of these references are to the full cycle of Israel’s festivals. Moreover, all of these occurrences of חַגְּדָנָה are plural nouns like המַעֲנֵי in Genesis 1:14. Of the 160 occurrences of המַעֲנֵי in the Torah, only nine are plural. Of these nine, one is המַעֲנֵי in Genesis 1:14. The remaining eight are the ones listed above, all of which unambiguously mean ‘festivals’.

The identification of המַעֲנֵי with ‘festivals’ is especially highlighted in Leviticus 23. Here the construct plurals מֲשָׂרְיִים and מַעֲנֵי appear to form an inclusio not unlike the one in Numbers 28–

14 This section was set off from the previous one (‘Time of Commemorating Pesach’) because Deuteronomy 16:6 seems to emphasize the ‘time’ of day when Israel departed from Egypt.
29. The content of this inclusio, however, goes beyond the narrow focus on festival ‘offerings’ in Numbers 28–29 and covers a range of festival-related observances (e.g. sacrifices, assemblies, rest days, eating matzah, fasting, blowing the ram’s horn, rejoicing with choice fruit from the harvest and leafy branches, dwelling in booths, etc.). In Leviticus 23, מַחְלֶלְיָמִים (in construct form) is identified with ‘festivals’ in its broadest and most comprehensive sense:

In sum, there are 160 occurrences of מַחְלֶלְיָמִים in the Torah that can be divided into six categories of meaning. The first two categories of meaning are not compatible with the Genesis 1:14 context and can be precluded on this basis. The remaining four categories all refer directly to aspects of Israel’s festival cycle or to the cycle as a whole. The following four tables compare the above findings with data from the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

Table 1: Usage Distribution of מַחְלֶלְיָמִים in the Hebrew Bible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>מַחְלֶלְיָמִים in the Torah</th>
<th>מַחְלֶלְיָמִים in the Historical Books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19 Festival-Related</td>
<td>6 Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Time of Offerings, esp. Festivals (1)</td>
<td>4 Set Time Appointed by Prophet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Time Commemorating Pesach (1)</td>
<td>1 Meeting Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Appointed Time of a Festival (9)</td>
<td>1 Appointed Signal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Festivals (8)</td>
<td>1 Appointed Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Assembly/Set Time for Act of God</td>
<td>1 Appointed Cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 מַחְלֶלְיָמִים in Gn. 1:14 [?]</td>
<td>1 Providential Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Appointment between Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Set Time Appointed by King</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

160 - Total          28 - Total
A complete picture of how the plural of מֵּתָּה is used in the Hebrew Bible is tallied below according to genre:

**Table 3: Summary of All Plural Forms of מֵּתָּה in the Hebrew Bible**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citation</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Parsing</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Torah</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gn. 1:14</td>
<td>לִמְעַיְנָה</td>
<td>m.pl. w/ prepar.</td>
<td>[? ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lv. 23:2</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. construct</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lv. 23:2</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. construct w/1cs</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lv. 23:4</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. construct</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lv. 23:37</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. construct</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lv. 23:44</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. construct</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nu. 10:10</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. const. w/2mp, prepar.</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nu. 15:3</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. const. w/2mp, prepar.</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nu. 29:39</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. const. w/2mp, prepar.</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Historical Books</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Ch. 23:31</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. w/ prepar.</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Ch. 2:4[3]</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. const. w/ prepar.</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Ch. 8:13</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. w/ prepar.</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Ch. 31:3</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. w/ prepar.</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezr. 3:5</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. construct</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ne. 10:33[4]</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. w/ prepar.</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poetical Books</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ps. 74:8</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. construct</td>
<td>Meeting places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ps. 104:19</td>
<td>מֵּתָּה</td>
<td>m.pl. w/ prepar.</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15 Psalm 104:19a (‘He made/appointed the moon for מֵּתָּה …’) cannot refer to the natural seasons since the natural seasons are regulated by the sun due to the earth’s tilt, not the moon. By contrast, the moon is given pride of place in the Hebrew Bible as the primary luminary that regulates Israel’s festival cycle (Nu. 10:10; 1 Sa. 20:5, 18, 24; 2...
Table 4: All Occurrences of לְפִיוּדִים in the Hebrew Bible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citation</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Parsing</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gn. 1:14</td>
<td>לְפִיוּדִים</td>
<td>m.pl. w/ prep.</td>
<td>[?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Ch. 23:31</td>
<td>לְפִיוּדִים</td>
<td>m.pl. w/ prep.</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Ch. 31:3</td>
<td>לְפִיוּדִים</td>
<td>m.pl. w/ prep.</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ne. 10:33[4]</td>
<td>לְפִיוּדִים</td>
<td>m.pl. w/ prep.</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ps. 104:19</td>
<td>לְפִיוּדִים</td>
<td>m.pl. w/ prep.</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zc. 8:19</td>
<td>לְפִיוּדִים</td>
<td>m.pl. w/ prep.</td>
<td>Festivals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III. Literary Context

We now turn to two elements of literary context in Genesis 1:1–2:3 that support a ‘festivals’ interpretation: priestly language and havdil imagery.

Ki. 4:23; 1 Ch. 23:31; Ezr. 3:5; Ne. 10:33[34]; Ps. 81:3–4[4–5]; Is. 1:14; 66:23; Ezk. 46:1, 6; Ho. 5:7; Am. 8:5). Consider that all festival dates point to the moon (e.g. Pesach = fourteenth day of the first month = full moon of the first lunar cycle). The sun affects this cycle by regulating the length of days and agricultural seasons, which must coincide with Israel’s harvest festivals (Bikkurim, Shavuot, Sukkot). The secondary role of the sun vis-à-vis the festivals is suggested in Ps. 104:19b by its secondary mention, even though it is the larger luminary.
a) Priestly Language

The festivals rendering is affirmed by liturgical language in the creation account, language that has led to Genesis 1 being designated a P source in redaction critical studies. The fourth day of creation, in particular, stresses the cultic aspect by using the term (lamp) as a metonymy for sun and moon (Gn. 1:14, 15, 16 [3×]). All other occurrences of in the Torah refer to lamps in the (Ex. 25:6; 27:20; 35:8, 14, 28; 39:37; Lv. 24:2; Nu. 4:9, 16). Among these passages, the terms and often occur in close proximity (e.g. Ex. 27:20–21; 35:21–28; 39:37–40; Lv. 24:2–3; Nu. 4:15–16), further emphasizing the cultic relationship. It may be argued that the writer of Genesis 1 uses this cultic imagery to depict the sun and moon as being like ‘sacred lamps in the sanctuary of the universe’. A ‘festivals’ translation of in Genesis 1:14 would fit elegantly within this context since Israel’s festivals were also cultic in nature. They were appointed times when offerings were presented to the Lord before the light of the in the appointed place of meeting (Nu. 28:1–29:39).

17 Bruce K. Gardner, The Genesis Calendar: The Synchronistic Tradition in Genesis 1–11 (New York: University Press of America, 2001), 62–63; Otto Eissfeldt, The Old Testament: The History of the Formation of the Old Testament (tr. Peter R. Ackroyd; New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 188; Hermann Gunkel, Genesis (tr. Mark E. Biddle; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 102–131. Although I myself do not hold to the documentary hypothesis, the view is common enough to make several comments. Of the 160 occurrences of in the Torah, 149 (93%) occur between Exodus 25 and Numbers 31, a section understood to include most of the work of the so-called priestly writer (P) (Koch, ‘dwm’, 167). 133 of these 149 occurrences are in construct with (‘Tent of Meeting’). Two additional examples of may be found in Deuteronomy 31:14, for a combined total of 135 occurrences. Vogels, ‘Cultic and Civil Calendars’, 166, notes that the ‘usage of mo’ed shows that the word is rarely used in the Deuteronomistic Literature and in books with less interest in liturgy, such as the prophets and wisdom. In all of wisdom literature the word appears only once and carries no liturgical connotation (Jb. 30,23). The word is used frequently in the Torah (160×, of which 135 for the tent of meeting). Among the prophets, Ezekiel uses it most often (5×). It appears several times in Lamentations (6×), and in the literature of the Chronicist (Ezr [1×], Neh [1×], 1 and 2 Chr [12×, of which 7× for the tent of meeting]). Clearly, the word mo’ed is part of priestly and liturgical language.’

18 Vogels, ‘Cultic and Civil Calendars’, 175.
b) Havdil Imagery

Genesis 1 places strong emphasis on order and separation. God divides his creation into distinct spheres. Light is separated from darkness, day from night, waters above from waters below, earth from seas, plants from trees, birds from fish, cattle from wild animals, and male from female. The verb (to separate) occurs five times in Genesis 1 (vv. 4, 6, 7, 14, 18). Notably, two out of the five references are to the fourth day of creation; one reference is in Genesis 1:14.

Viewed against this backdrop of havdil imagery, the string of plural nouns (in Genesis 1:14) may arguably be a division of two types of time: sacred time (signs and festivals) and ordinary time (days and years). Analogous to such a qualitative time distinction is the relationship between the first six days of creation and the seventh day. The seventh day was designated by God as holy time ( and served as a forerunner of the Shabbat (Ex. 20:8–11), a festival central to Israel’s cultic calendar.

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20 Vogels, ‘Cultic and Civil Calendars’, 168.
21 ‘The Bible refers to such signs: the rainbow for Noah (Gen 9,12–13), or the stars for Abraham (Gen 15,5; Matt 2,2), or the sun (2 Kgs 20,8–10; Is 38,7; Mal 3,20), or all the heavenly lights in general (Joel 3,3; Matt 24,29; Rev 6,12–14). But at times the Bible also warns against those who study these heavenly signs (Jer 10,2; Is 47,13; Job 31,26)’ (Vogels, ‘Cultic and Civil Calendars’, 167).
22 Vogels, ‘Cultic and Civil Calendars’, 169.
23 The relationship between the Shabbat and festivals is a close one in the Hebrew Bible, even to the extent that the Shabbat is designated as one of the (Lv. 23:1–3). Vogels, ‘Cultic and Civil Calendars’, 178, argues on this basis, ‘The sabbath belongs to the cultic calendar. The seventh day is one of these “festivals” mentioned in the fourth day’. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, however, the Sabbath is noted side by side with the festivals and is considered distinct (1 Ch. 23:31; 2 Ch. 8:13; 31:3; Ne. 10:33 [34]; La. 2:6; Is. 1:13–14; Ho. 2:11 [13]). Milgrom explains this as the result of an H redactor in Babylon (Jacob Milgrom, Leviticus 23–27 [AB 3B; New York: Doubleday, 2001], 1956). A simpler explanation, however, may be that the Shabbat is integral to the festival cycle in the dating of the festivals of Bikkurim and Shavuot (Lv. 23:11, 15–16; see J.E. Hartley, Leviticus [WBC; Dallas: Word, 1992]). At the same time, the Shabbat is not lunar-based and therefore distinct from the annual festival cycle.
IV. Ancient Near Eastern Background

The cognate equivalent of וֹמ is probably derived from the root נvelop.24 The cognate equivalent of וֹמ is attested in Near Eastern languages other than Hebrew, including Akkadian (adannu), Arabic (maw‘id), Ugaritic (m’d) and Aramaic (mō‘ādā). The rather consistent witness of Akkadian lexicographers is that Akkadian attests to the ‘appointed time’ or ‘period of time’ rendering of וֹמ in the Hebrew Bible.25 The same is true with Arabic.26 In Ugaritic, of the five occurrences of m’d, all refer to phr m’d, a place/time of assembly [of the gods], an expression that likely corresponds to הבֵית מוֹמ in Isaiah 14:13.27 Inherent in this expression may be an allusion to corresponding festivals on earth.28 Finally, the one occurrence we have of the Aramaic mō‘ādā refers to a

24 ‘The triliteral root וֹמ is evidently another expansion of the biliteral יבּ root. Although it is listed in Hebrew lexicons under יבּ the Niphal, Hiphil, and Hophal forms of the verb indicate that the first radical is 7. This is confirmed by the cognates. The idea of “fixing a time” is represented by this root in all Semitic languages. Not infrequently derivatives of the root have reference to fixed religious seasons which recur at regular intervals so that the fundamental notion of “recurrence” appears here also. Many of the derivatives of יבּ, however, take on the extended meanings of “appoint” in a more general sense, “assemble at appointed times or places”, and “agree upon” some appointed or accepted terms, that is, “promise”, “predict” or “threaten….Derivatives of the roots וֹמ and יבּ appear a good deal in covenant contexts in the Old Testament. They occur particularly frequently in reference to the covenant between Yahweh and Israel’ (J.A. Thompson, ‘Expansions of the יבּ Root’, Journal of Semitic Studies 10 [1965] 229, 239).


28 ‘… both the Ugaritic and OT contexts suggest rather a “fixed time for the assembly (of the gods)”; in neither instance is the reference to ad hoc meetings, but rather to regularly recurring occasions which presumably are to be celebrated concurrently as festivals on earth as well’ (Koch, הבֵית מוֹמ, 171). See H. Donner & W. Röllig, A Synoptic Concordance of Aramaic Inscriptions (eds. Walter E. Aufrecht, J. Arthur Baird & David Noel Freedman; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975).
‘festival’.

This data indicates that cognate equivalents of  הדעיכא in ANE literature tend to correlate with the semantic range of  קָדָשׁ in the Hebrew Bible. ‘Appointed time’ is the most common meaning, but ‘festival’ and ‘period of time’ are also attested.

Two ANE creation accounts (Egyptian and Mesopotamian) exist in which festivals are attested. In an Egyptian creation account redacted during the time of the Ramessides, the sun god Re declares that he brought into being ‘hours’, ‘days’ and ‘New year festivals’, language similar to Genesis 1:14. The Mesopotamian *Enûma Eliš* creation story also refers to ‘New Year’s [day]’ (*ina zag-[muk-ki]*) in Tablet V (40–42) following the installation of moon and sun. That ‘New Year’s [day]’ here was understood to mean a festal observance is supported by the reading of the *Enûma Eliš* on the fourth day of the New Year festival in Babylon. Moreover, in the Mesopotamian world


33 Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 60, 332; Mark E. Cohen, *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda: CDL, 1993), 444. I would conjecture that the climax of the New Year reading of *Enûma Eliš* was the Table V narrative concerning the inception of ‘New Year’s [day]’ following the installation of moon and sun. Here the day of worship is explicitly mentioned and its origin is highlighted in the liturgy, bringing to mind the themes of luminaries (stars, moon, sun [2, 4, 6, 12, 15, 19, 27, 45]), time (night and day, days, weeks, months, years [2–5, 13–18, 22, 46]) and appointed festivals (41), all of which find parallels in the fourth day of the Genesis creation account.
from the time of the third millennium B.C.E., the New Year was typically a spring cultic festival and the first celebration of an annual cycle of festivals divided into two axes. Much attention was given to its ritual observance.

V. Second Temple Jewish Literature

The Second Temple period is important for assessing how נחלות in Genesis 1:14 was read by diverse streams within early Judaism.

a) Septuagint

The Septuagint translators chose the word καιρούς to render נחלות in Genesis 1:14. There are no variants. The plural noun appears in eight other Septuagint Pentateuch passages, always in reference to festival times. The three annual pilgrimage festivals of Pesach/Matzot, Shavuot, and Sukkot are particularly in view (Ex. 13:10; 23:14, 17; 34:23, 24; Nu. 9:3; Dt. 16:16). For this reason, Wevers suggests in Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis that the ‘… word καιρούς probably does not mean “seasons of the year” but rather the designated times, i.e. the festivals, the נחלות’.37

b) Wisdom of Ben Sira 43:2–8

In the Wisdom of Ben Sira 43:2–8, the writer alludes to the creation account. The sun is described as the ‘work of the Most High … Great is the Lord who made it …’. Similarly, the moon is described as ‘governing the times’, ‘a sign’, ‘shining in the vault of the heavens’, all

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allusions to Genesis 1. In this context, and most relevant to this study, the writer declares, ‘From the moon comes the sign for festal days’. The Greek here is: ἀπὸ σελήνης σημεῖον ἑορτῆς. Notably, LXX Pentateuch translators used ἑορτή for the plural of יָמִינָם when referring to festivals (Lv. 23:2 [2×], 4, 37, 44; Nu. 10:10; 15:3; 29:39). Moreover, Hebrew fragments discovered at Masada confirm that יָמִינָヌ was included in the Hebrew MS of Ben Sira 43:6–7 along with the word for pilgrimage festival (נָפָל). The combination of these two words for Israelite feast day celebrations is found throughout the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Ex. 23:15; 34:18; Lv. 23:4–6; Ho. 9:5).

c) Jubilees 2:8–10

The Book of Jubilees 2:8–10 includes the following midrashic interpretation of Genesis 1:14–19:

And on the fourth day he made the sun and the moon and the stars. And he set them in the firmament of heaven so that they might give light upon the whole earth and rule over the day and the night and separate light and darkness. And the LORD set the sun as a great sign upon the earth for days, sabbaths, months, feast (days), years, sabbaths of years, jubilees, and for all of the (appointed) times of the years — and it separates the light from the darkness — and so that everything which sprouts and grows upon the earth might surely prosper. These three kinds he made on the fourth day (Jub 2:8–10).39

It is clear from the midrash (‘And the LORD set the sun40 as a great sign upon the earth for days, sabbaths, months, feast [days], years, sabbaths of years, jubilees, and for all of the [appointed] times of the years’) that the author interprets יָמִינָヌ in Genesis 1:14 to be a reference to Israel’s calendar.41

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39 O.S. Wintermute (tr.), ‘Jubilees’, in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha II (ed. James H. Charlesworth; Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 56. VanderKam’s translation of verse 9 differs only slightly, ‘The Lord appointed the sun as a great sign above the earth for days, sabbaths, months, festivals, years, sabbaths of years, jubilees, and all times of he years’ (VanderKam, Calendars, 28).
40 The writer regards the sun as the primary luminary that regulates Israel’s calendar. This is consistent with the 364-day solar calendar that is described in the Book of Jubilees.
41 4Q216 VI (4Qjub 2:7–12) was unfortunately in very poor condition. Martinez reconstructs vv. 7–8: ‘[light and darkness. And he placed the sun as a gr]eat [sign above the earth] for the day[s], the [sa]bbaths, the [months], [the feasts, the years, the weeks of years and the jubilees and for all the cycl[es of the years.]’ (Florentino Garcia Martinez & Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 463. Given the Genesis 1:14 context, I conjecture that the original included יָמִינָヌ for ‘feasts’.
d) Dead Sea Scrolls

The inclusion of מָהָלִים in 4QGen⁵, 4QGen⁸ and 4QGen⁹ is confirmatory of the MT orthography. The only omission found is in 4QGen⁸ and 4QGen⁹ (מָהָלִים) where the mater lectionis ו is not there.

Clines lists 258 occurrences of מָהָלִים in the Dead Sea Scrolls apart from 4QGen. Occurrences are broken down into the following semantic categories: Appointed time, due season (141); festival, (time of) appointed feast (92); agreement, appointment (18); meeting, assembly (4); and Tent of Meeting (3).

The Qumran community followed the Jubilees calendar, which consisted of a fifty-two week year, each quarter consisting of thirteen weeks (Jub. 6:29–30) with some form of intercalation. Barthélemy has argued that the Qumran New Year annually occurred on Wednesday, the fourth day of the week, and suggests that this was to commemorate the fourth day of creation when the luminaries were installed. Jaubert’s critical study of the Jubilees calendar confirms Barthélemy’s theory. Jaubert demonstrates that, when one follows the Jubilees calendar, the festivals annually fall on the same days of the week: Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. Wednesday appears to be the most prominent of these days since each trimester of the Jubilees calendar begins on a Wednesday and almost all of the appointed

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44 VanderKam, Calendars, 111.

45 In support of this thesis, Barthélemy quotes the Moslem writer Al-Biruni (c. 973–1048), ‘Abu-Isa Alwarrak speaks in his Kitab al-Makalat of a Jewish sect known as the Maghariba, who claim that festivals are legal only when the moon appears full in Palestine in the night of Wednesday which follows the day of Tuesday, after sun-set. This is their New Year’s Day. It is from this day that the days and months are reckoned and that the annual cycle of festivals begins. For God created the two great givers of light on a Wednesday. Likewise, they do not allow that the Pasch [=Passover] fall on any day other than Wednesday’. See D. Barthélemy, ‘Notes en marge de publication récentes sur les manuscrits de Qumran’, Revue Biblique 59 (1952) 199–203. Quoted in VanderKam, Calendars, 53. See also E. Sachau, The Chronology of Ancient Nations (London, 1879), 278.
festivals fall on a Wednesday, most notably the pilgrimage festivals.\(^{46}\) The existence of a link between these Wednesday (fourth day) festival celebrations and בָּאָרָיוֹן in the fourth day of creation has been suggested by VanderKam,\(^{47}\) Wenham,\(^{48}\) Beauchamp,\(^{49}\) and Vogels.\(^{50}\)

e) Philo

Philo wrote extensively on Israel’s festivals and refers to the divine purpose of the luminaries (Gn. 1:14) in De Opificio Mundi:\(^{51}\)

> One purpose was to give light; another to be signs; a third duty to fix seasons \([καιρῶν]\) of the year; and lastly for the sake of days, months, years, which (as we all know) have served as measures of time and given birth to number (Philo, \textit{Opif.} 18.55 [Colson and Whitaker LCL]).\(^{52}\)

That Philo equates καιρούς with the four seasons of the year is confirmed by his elucidation of Genesis 1:14 a few paragraphs later:

> It is added, moreover, ‘and for appointed times’ \([καιρούς]\) (Gen. i.14). By ‘appointed times’ \([καιρούς]\) Moses understood the four seasons of the year … (Philo, \textit{Opif.} 19.59 [Colson and Whitaker LCL]).

Philo uses καιρούς in its broadest sense (‘appointed times’) to tease out the ‘four seasons’ rendering. He does not address the common use of the plural noun elsewhere in the Greek Pentateuch to designate Israel’s cultic/harvest festivals.

Notably, Philo’s case for a ‘four seasons’ rendering is based mainly on allegorical interpretation. In the middle of a lengthy discussion on the hidden meaning of the fourth digit, Philo suggests that the word καιρούς in Genesis 1:14 must relate to the \textit{four} seasons since it first appears in the context of the \textit{fourth} day of creation.\(^{53}\) Philo’s emphasis on numbers (in particular 4, 7, 6, 10) to unlock the meaning of a biblical text was a reflection of his Hellenistic approach to interpreting

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\(^{46}\) A. Jaubert, \textit{The Date of the Last Supper} (tr. I. Rafferty; Staten Island: Alba, 1965).


\(^{48}\) Gordon J. Wenham, \textit{The Book of Leviticus} (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 302 n. 4.

\(^{49}\) Beauchamp, \textit{Création et séparation}, 113–16.

\(^{50}\) Vogels, ‘Cultic and Civil Calendars’, 177.


\(^{52}\) Cf. Philo, \textit{Act.} 4.19; \textit{Opif.} 14.45.

\(^{53}\) Philo, \textit{Opif.} 16.52; \textit{Plant.} 28.120.
the Hebrew Bible. In *De Opificio Mundi*, he draws heavily from the Pythagoreans.54

**Conclusion**

Confirming the trend in biblical scholarship, we conclude that a reasonable case can be made for rendering מִדְיַדְיוֹם (m.pl. w/ prep.) means ‘festivals’ one hundred percent of the time in the Hebrew Bible; one instance (Ps. 104:19) refers directly to Genesis 1:14. Literary context and ANE background bolster the ‘[cultic] festivals’ reading. Genesis 1:1–2:3 is replete with priestly/liturgical language and havdil imagery. Among ANE creation accounts similar to Genesis 1, an Egyptian and Mesopotamian one (the *Enûma Eliš*) were found which make reference to New Year festivals. Finally, Second Temple Jewish literature generally upholds the ‘festivals’ translation. Philo, an exception, favours the ‘four seasons’ interpretation based on allegorical/Pythagorean premises. Looking back over the evidence, the weight of biblical exegesis and earlier sources seems to support the ‘festivals’ or ‘festivals and seasons’ reading. Later sources, such as Philo, expectedly give rise to a diversity of new interpretations.