Summary of views

The following study is intended to contribute to the discussion, which has been in progress for some decades, concerning the question whether the day 1), before as well as after the exile, both as to the civil and cultic conception, (1) begins with the evening, i.e., with sunset, as has often been assumed or, as strongly argued at present (2) the sunrise heralds the new day.

The view under (1) will be denoted, for the sake of brevity, as the "evening theory", and the other (2) as the "morning theory".

In B. Jacob the evening theory has found a new proponent. In his comments on Gen. i 5 2) he makes a clarifying distinction between "Rangordnung" and "Zeitfolge" as regards night and day and states that according to the "Rangordnung" for the agrarian people of Israel the day took precedence over the night. The night is regarded as "quantité négligeable". Only in cases where it is necessary to lay emphasis on "night" or "at night" the usual order "day and night" will be changed into "night and day" (cf. sub II, 1c below). But speaking about the "Zeitfolge" (necessarily taking his starting point at the beginning, i.e., the creation), he sets forth that the first days began with the light (Gen. i 3) and were completed by the night (Gen. i 5b). But since God ceased working at the evening of the 6th day, the beginning of the 7th day, the sabbath day, should be fixed on the evening—"also begann der siebente Tag am Abend, also auch jeder folgende".

1) Unless otherwise stated, by day is meant "space of 24 hours".
2) Das Erste Buch der Tora, Genesis, 1934.
Of the morning theory there exist several variations:
1. P. J. HEAWOOD, for example, argued 1) that from the creation till A.D. 50, the division morning-morning applied. Starting from a different point of view U. CASSUTO 2) came to a similar conclusion: There only exists one time standard in the whole period covered by the Bible, i.e., the one taking the morning as the beginning of the day, “but in regard to the festivals and appointed times, the Torah ordains that they shall be observed also on the night of the preceding day” (the italics are CASSUTO’s).

2. In a reaction to the article by HEAWOOD, S. ZEITLIN 3) has introduced as a rather sharp caesura the Babylonian exile in the sense that earlier the morning-morning division applied, and after the Babylonian exile the evening-evening division. Except for some minor distinctions, (see below), this is also the view of R. DE VAUX 4).

A variation to both theories is represented by G. BARROIS 5): Both methods of reckoning occur in the Bible at the same time and next to one another. This also seems to be the view of G. VON RAD 6) when he poses that the “althebräische Tag... — wenigstens offiziell kultisch — abends (begann)”.

Purpose and method

We intend to come to a judgement with regard to the above views on exegetical grounds using as a working hypothesis the caesura as brought forward by ZEITLIN and De VAUX. We therefore first examine the texts from the post-exilic period in order to find out whether on the one hand HEAWOOD and CASSUTO or on the other hand JACOB, ZEITLIN and De VAUX are right (the latter three agree in their view that the day, at least after the exile, both cultic and civil, started with the evening) or that, with BARROIS, one has to transcend the dilemma. We further examine the pre-exilic texts in order to find out whether there really exists a caesura, and whether JACOB or HEAWOOD, CASSUTO and ZEITLIN are right, or maybe BARROIS, De VAUX and Von Rad with their gradations. In this part of our