

6 The Artist as Exegete: Bennett's *Temple of Ezekiel (Torat Ha-Bayit) (1824)*

In 1824, Bennett's *Temple of Ezekiel: viz. An Elucidation of the 40th, 41st, 42nd, &c. Chapters of Ezekiel, Consistently with the Hebrew Original and a Minute Description of the Edifice, on Scientific Principles, Illustrated by a Ground-Plan and Bird's-Eye View* was published in London (see Figure 6.1). It was perhaps his best-known work, and certainly the one most elegantly printed and most well-supported by Christians and Jews alike. The English translation and commentary were accompanied by an engraved portrait of the author and two detailed engravings of the Temple, by a list of highly significant patrons, and by a heartfelt dedication to the person who had contributed most to this project. Bennett had obviously worked on this book for a long time. He mentions that he had already prepared the plates when he was a young man still living in Belarus.¹ He had finished the English work apparently as early as 1811 (the date with which he closes the preface both in English and Hebrew) and had struggled to find a publisher and the means to publish the book. But in 1824, his effort was crowned with success as he acquired the needed financial support and found publishers willing to produce this attractive work. The book was printed by the well-known A. J. Valpy of Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, and published by the author, 14 Panton St., Haymarket, along with R. Hunter of 72 St. Paul's Church Yard, and M. Solomon of 119 Pall Mall.²

M. Solomon was none other than Myer Solomon, one of the most prominent Jews of London—cantor, ritual slaughterer, preacher, and circumciser—as well as philanthropist and proprietor of a popular bric-à-brac store on 119 Pall Mall that drew many visitors, Jewish as well as Christian. Solomon had founded the Western Synagogue, a synagogue where Bennett was at least a nominal member

1 See Solomon Bennett, *Nezah Yisra'el: The Constancy of Israel: An Unprejudiced Illustration of Some of the Most Important Texts of the Bible: or, A Polemical, Critical, and Theological Reply to a Public Letter, by Lord Crawford, Addressed to the Hebrew Nation* (London: W. H. Wyatt, 1809), 156–157: “I have in my possession two different plans of the Temple described by Ezekiel, which I performed in the earlier part of my life for the Bible Society when in my native Country, according to different Commentators, executed in a proper manner, with all dimensions, geometrically represented, and fully described, agreeable to the text of the Bible, (which at a more successful period, I intend to engrave and publish).” For discussion of this statement, see chapter 1, above.

2 On Valpy, see W. P. Courtney, revised by Richard Jenkyns, “Valpy, Abraham John (*bap.* 2786, *d.* 1854),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 17, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28054>. On Hunter's publishing history, see the Open Library webpage at Internet Archive, https://openlibrary.org/publishers/R._Hunter_, and Philip A. H. Brown, *London Publishers and Printers, c. 1800– 1870* (London: British Library, 1982), index. On Solomon, see the next footnote.

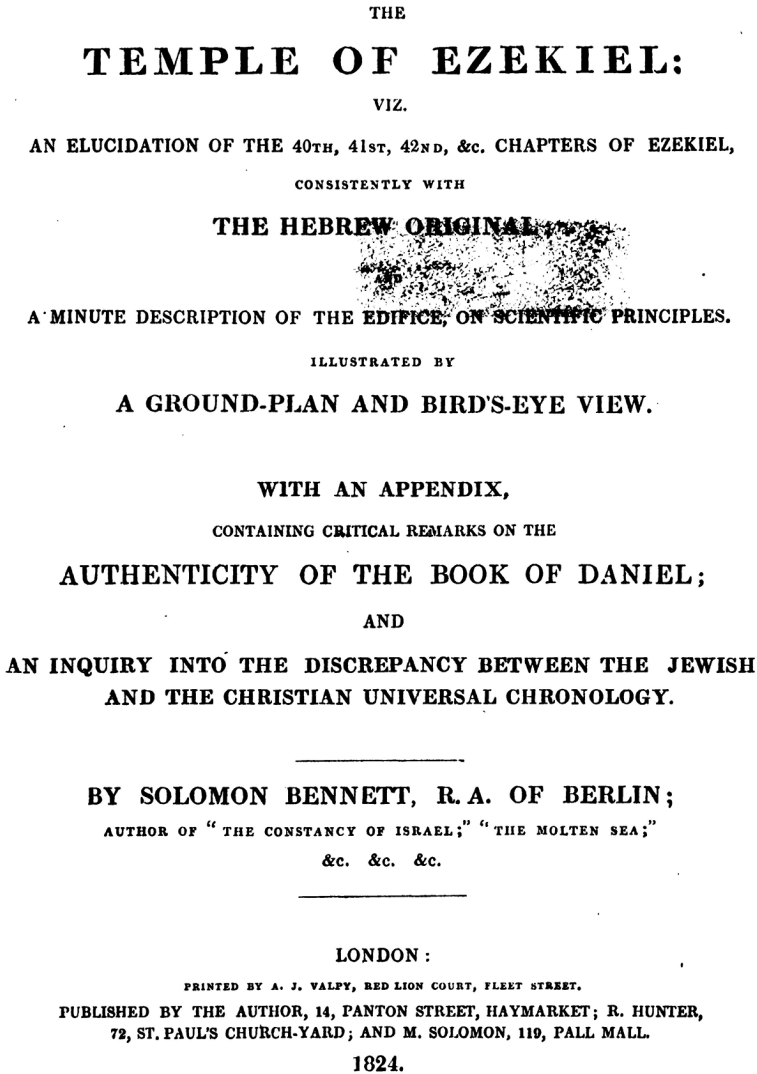


Figure 6.1: Title page of Bennett's *The Temple of Ezekiel* (London, 1824).

along with several of his sons.³ Myer Solomon was listed as a patron of the book as well as publisher.

³ On Myer Solomon, see Arthur Barnett, *The Western Synagogue through Two Centuries (1761–1961)* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1961), 151–155. See also “The Circumcision Register of Myer Solomon of

Upon completing the English edition, Bennett prepared a Hebrew version intended for his co-religionists on the Continent and especially in Belarus. The manuscript is still extant but was never published. Though the Hebrew manuscript generally follows the English, it clearly adds comments not found in the printed version, designed for a readership that was Jewish and literate in Hebrew.⁴

While Bennett had benefited from sponsors who supported several of his other books, his success in gaining patrons for this book on Ezekiel was especially impressive, beginning with the chief sponsor, Mrs. Catherine Housman, discussed in the preceding chapter. As we have seen, Bennett had previously been commissioned by her to create engravings on biblical themes for her various publications; she had read several of his books both prior to and following the publication of the Ezekiel volume; and in the case of two of his works, she also contributed to their printing. He most likely had read her own works on the conflict between biblical truth and modern science. Bennett obviously valued her supportive relationship, as he indicates in his warm dedication to her quoted above.⁵

Besides Mrs. Housman, Bennett's list of patrons includes several eminent clergymen, barristers, and literary figures, mostly Christians but some influential Jews as well. A number were long-term friends and supporters such as the Unitarian leader William Frend, the distinguished and controversial scholar of the ancient world William Drummond, and a Jewish merchant originally from Amsterdam named Morris Solomon. Bennett dedicated other books to Frend and Solomon and published his correspondence with Drummond on the book of Daniel as an appendix to this book.⁶ The Christian clergymen included the Lord Bish-

the Western Synagogue, 1782–1839," *JCR-UK: The Susser Archive*, August 18, 2014, <https://www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/susser/myersolomoncircreg.htm>.

4 Solomon Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, MS Jews College 4 (now London School of Jewish Studies MS 4); digital copy in National Library of Israel, NLI Film no. F 5376.

5 Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 5. See chapter 5, above.

6 I deal with Frend's and Drummond's relationship with Bennett more extensively in chapter 4, above. On Morris Solomon, I am grateful for the following information supplied by Professor Bart Wallet. Morris Solomon was the son of Isaac Morris and Sarah Solomon. He married Sarah Lehren, the daughter of Moses Lehren and Judith Dusnetz, on April 24, 1816, in The Hague. The Lehren family hailed from Mainz, where they had their own Klaus synagogue, and in The Hague they became the foremost Orthodox family in town, with very close ties to the local Ashkenazi chief rabbi. Moreover, Judith Dusnetz was related to the chief rabbis of Nijmegen and Leeuwarden. Sarah's brothers were the famous bankers Zvi Hirsch(el), Abika and Jacob Moses Lehren, who served for years as the *Pekidim* and *Amarcalim* [charity officials] for the holy cities in the land of Israel. They mobilized Orthodox rabbis across Europe against the rise of the Reform movement. So, through his wife Sarah—who in non-Jewish circles called herself Suzette—Morris Solomon was related to one of the wealthiest, most pious, and most controversial families of the

ops of Durham (Shute Barrington), Lichfield and Coventry (Henry Ryder), and St. Davids (Thomas Burgess), as well as Rev. Samuel Bennett, the Duke of Sussex's chaplain and close friend. John Borthwick Gilchrist, the learned Scottish linguist who studied Hindustani, was another subscriber, as were G. W. Marriott, Esq., chancellor of the Diocese of St. David's; John Charles Spenser, the third Earl of Spenser, who would later become chancellor of the exchequer; and Nicholas Vansittart, the first Baron Bexley and a former chancellor of the exchequer.

Not unexpectedly, several subscribers were probably recruited by Mrs. Housman, especially several clergymen from Bath.⁷ Most conspicuous were several prominent Jewish rabbis and communal leaders who supported Bennett's publication despite their previous hostility or at least past indifference to the author. Bennett's main nemesis, Rabbi Solomon Hirschell, the chief Ashkenazic rabbi, along with his Sephardic colleague, Rabbi Raphael Meldola, surprisingly subscribed to Bennett's publication. Besides Morris Solomon, I. L. Goldsmid of the well-known Goldsmid family was listed, along with several other Jews. It seems likely that the persuasive efforts of Myer Solomon played a role in this new and unexpected show of support, especially from the two rabbis.⁸

6.1 The English preface

Bennett opens his commentary with a long preface explaining his objective in choosing the subject of Ezekiel's Temple and composing his own commentary on the relevant chapters of the biblical book: to correct the misleading and false understanding of the Hebrew Bible promoted by Christian commentators. Bennett asserts that "Christians see it as a mere emblematical representation of the Temple of Christ." But this contradicts, Bennett claims, the sheer logic of Ezekiel's purpose in all his prophecies, to encourage Jews in captivity to rebuild their commonwealth. If so, why would he speak of a third temple; what consolation would they derive from an imaginary one? This notion of modern Christian scholarship is "a little less absurd than the fictions of romance," he adds. In contrast to their fantasies, the biblical text describes in detail a real temple plan, not a mystery. There-

Netherlands. Ironical indeed that he would prove to be such a faithful supporter of the non-Orthodox Jew Solomon Bennett.

7 Doctor Spry (recipient of a letter from Mrs. Housman that was published in 1839), Rev. Mr. Broadhurst, Rev. William Hunt, Rev. Mr. Mapletoft, and Mr. Salome, all from Bath.

8 I deal more extensively with the relationship between Bennett and the two rabbis in chapter 3, above. Besides Goldsmid, the other Jews mentioned as subscribers are Abraham Hertz, Lyon Moses, Asher Samson, and Mr. L. Samson.

fore, he directly asks his reader, “[S]hall the Christian better understand the Hebrew literature, and know its history from its primitive to its present state, than the Hebrews themselves?”⁹

As was true of his other writings, this polemic against Christian biblical exegesis was hardly a matter of scholarly disagreement alone but also highly personal. In a series of revealing anecdotes in the opening pages of his commentary, Bennett describes his frustrating efforts to publish his commentary, disclosing the challenges of a solitary Jewish intellectual, not a clergyman, living among a Christian majority. He first complains about the prejudice he felt as a Jew without an honorific title “when the author is, not only, an untitled layman, but one who lives by the produce of his industry, and above all, bears the name of a Jew! Of this I may speak confidently, have experimentally suffered from it.” He relates how he was refused by one bookseller, who claimed, “It is our duty to suppress everything related to Hebrew literature,” and added that he should publish his work anonymously. Another told Bennett he paid no regard to any work that was not of a religious nature (“according to his own religious notions”). And someone from the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews held forth about his project: “Is it not vanity and presumption in a mortal being, to imagine that he can explain visions, which were the revelation of God himself?”¹⁰

On another occasion, Bennett encountered the same person in the council chamber of the London Society, who sarcastically asked him, in the presence of others,

Well, Mr. Bennett, how do you get on with the temple of Ezekiel? have you already raised its walls, or do you dream of it? &c.” I replied, in his own tone, “*Imaginary* temples are certainly more expeditiously reared than real ones; and when there are so many Christian builders of *temples in the air*, why may not the Israelite be permitted to dream of a material one? He, whose liberality has provided us with *three real* temples, can surely not object to our *imagining* a fourth?”¹¹

The last retort elicits one final recitation of a pertinent encounter about religious and literary prejudices, as he puts it:

Some years ago, when I was about to publish my work on the Molten Sea [1821], I happened to be at the house of a literary friend who put a prospectus of the work into the hand of one of the company, with the view of inducing him to become a subscriber. But the gentleman, with a *philosophical* spirit, returned it, *vomiting* with a sneer—“Of what concern to us is king Solomon’s washing-tub for the temple?” [a reference to the irrigation system of the

⁹ Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 2–4.

¹⁰ Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 5.

¹¹ Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 6.

Temple of Solomon, described in 1 Kings 7] I could not hear such an unhallowed sentiment with indifference, but replied,—“I see whole societies bestow their labor on subjects of an importance far inferior to this; sending dilettanti to distant countries, and at great expense, to dig in the ruins of Greece, of Egypt, &c. to search for relics which they esteem as fit subjects for antiquarian research; and when sundry broken earthen pots, mutilated bas-reliefs, fragments of images, &c. &c. are happily discovered, they are carefully sent home. Then begin the literati to deliberate on these inestimable relics; and the results of these *interesting* deliberations are forthwith given to the world, with all the aid of typography and embellishment, and are devoured with literary eagerness. Yet I never heard anyone exclaim in this philosophical language – ‘What is it to us, whether these broken pots of ancient superstition were chamber-pots, washing-pots, or vessels of drunkards? If those fragments once represented kings, or tyrants, or idols?’” But I *may* ask if it becomes us thus to revive the superstitions of the ancients, and the absurdities and obscenities of heathen fable, and yet reject investigations which, independently of their claims on our regard in a religious point of view, embrace objects of a purer character, and a higher antiquity. Yet such are the fruits of malignant prejudice, when Judaism is its object.¹²

Having justified the need for his project, Bennett next lists the previous commentators on Ezekiel whom he had consulted, both Christian and Jewish, and whom he found wanting. Despite the abundant scholarship written on the Temple in general and Ezekiel’s Temple in particular, Bennett appears unaware of most of the well-known and influential Christian commentators. He seems totally oblivious to the classic work of the Spanish Jesuit Juan Bautista Villalpando, who, with Hieronimo Prado, published an exhaustive three-volume commentary on the book of Ezekiel, and specifically a separate volume on the Temple written by Villalpando himself (vol. 2, 1604). He also makes no mention of Johannes Coccejus’s 1669 work on the Ezekiel Temple, a critical revision of the Villalpando commentary. Nor was he aware of Isaac Newton’s writing on the subject.¹³

Bennett did apparently consult the commentary of Augustin Calmet (1672–1757), which offered a Temple reconstruction relying more closely on the biblical text and less on Renaissance and Baroque styles of architecture, though it focused primarily on the Temple of Solomon. He also consulted two English commentators. The first, Thomas Stackhouse (1677–1752), discussed the Ezekiel Temple in his *A New History of*

¹² Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 6–7n.

¹³ See, for example, Michael Rabens, “Baroque Visions of the Temple of Jerusalem,” *Oz* 17 (1995): article 8, <https://doi.org/10.4148/2378-5853.1274>, and Jeroen Goudeau, “Ezekiel for Solomon: The Temple of Jerusalem in Seventeenth-Century Leiden and the Case of Coccejus,” in *The Imagined and Real Jerusalem in Art and Architecture*, ed. Jeroen Goudeau, Mariette Verhoeven, and Wouter Weijers (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 88–113. On Newton and the Temple, see Tessa Morrison, “Isaac Newton and the Architectural Models of Solomon’s Temple,” *Avello Publishing Journal* 1 (2013): 1–18, and Matt Goldish, *Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998).

the Holy Bible (London, 1742–1744). It is hard to understand why Bennett singled out this popular but hardly distinguished work. But Bennett was considerably more impressed by the exegesis of John Gill (1697–1771), the Baptist theologian who produced “expositions” of the Old and New Testaments. The six folio volumes of the Old Testament commentary, completed in 1766, were based on extensive study of Jewish commentators, among others. In Bennett’s estimation, the commentaries of Calmet and Stackhouse are unsupported by the text; in contrast, “Dr. Gill, in his exposition of the Bible, has taken more pains than any subsequent critic.”¹⁴

More useful by far for Bennett’s work are the Jewish commentators, especially two: the standard medieval commentator Rashi and Yom Tov Lipmann Heller (1579–1654), author of *Zurat Ha-Bayit* (Prague, 1602). He also regularly consulted the Mishnaic tractate *Middot* in seeking to clarify the specific measurements of the Temple described by Ezekiel.

Bennett’s understanding of the origin of Ezekiel’s Temple plan is quite simple. It is a blueprint not of a third temple, one to emerge in the future, but rather of the Second Temple, the one constructed by Zerubbabel and fulfilled at the restoration from Babylonian captivity. Ezekiel’s colleagues, the later prophets and men of the so-called great assembly, who rebuilt the Temple probably had known Ezekiel personally and had received verbal instructions relating to their future political state.

The only remaining question for Bennett is why the Judeans did not execute the plan of the Temple of Ezekiel completely rather than only partially. Although they were treated as free men by the Persians, they incurred the jealousy of their neighbors and were forced to delay the rebuilding of the Temple by eighteen years. Despite the liberal treatment of the restored community under Cyrus and then Darius, the leaders resolved to deviate in part from the original grandeur of the plan proposed and described by Ezekiel. Their congregation was small and relatively poor, so they adopted a design that included only the principal parts of Ezekiel’s plan – that is, the actual Temple and sanctuary; its adjoining buildings

14 Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 8. For Calmet, see *Calmet’s Great Dictionary of the Holy Bible*, trans. and ed. Charles Taylor (London: printed for C. Taylor, 1797); Arnold Ages, “Calmet and the Rabbis,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 55 (1965): 340–349; and Rabens, “Baroque Visions of the Temple of Jerusalem.” On Stackhouse, see Scott Mandelbrote, “Stackhouse, Thomas (1681/2–1752),” September 23, 2004, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26197>. On Gill, see Michael A. G. Haykin, “Gill, John (1697–1771),” September 23, 2004, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10731>, and Gill’s *An Exposition of the New Testament* (3 vols. [London: printed for the author, 1746–1748]) and *An Exposition of the Old Testament* (6 vols. [London: printed for the author, 1748–1766]), available online as “John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible,” at <https://web.archive.org/web/20001010153543/http://www.freegrace.net/gill/>.

were deferred until a more favorable opportunity would present itself. With neither the financial means nor any time of relative peace available to them, the Temple was never completed as Ezekiel had conceived, but the Judeans were content with a smaller and simpler sanctuary.¹⁵

6.2 The Hebrew preface

That Bennett prepared a Hebrew version of his Ezekiel commentary (see figure 6.2) offers the modern reader a clearer and more profound understanding of the author's intentions and his self-reflection on the entire project. The Hebrew text certainly deviates from the English; one would expect Bennett to express himself differently to his respective audiences. But in essence, his message is the same in both versions, though he is less careful and less polite in voicing his grievances against Christian exegesis when writing in Hebrew to Jews alone. Moreover, the Hebrew version offers a more personalized sense of his inner convictions in relation to the Christian other. It also enables the reader to understand how Bennett understood himself, his own skills, and his contribution to Hebrew learning in relation to other Jewish scholars, past and present.

Bennett opens his Hebrew text by addressing his brethren, especially in Poland, lovers of Torah and wisdom. There the legacy of his forefathers was implanted within him; there he was nurtured and drank from its waters. But his spirit changed and “the sparks of light of my learning passed over my counte-

¹⁵ Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 9–20. For the assessment of recent scholarship on Ezekiel's Temple, see Tova Ganzel, “Between the Prophet and His Prophecy: Ezekiel's Visionary Temple in Its Historical Context,” in *The Believer and the Modern Study of the Bible*, ed. Tova Ganzel, Yehudah Brandes, and Chayuta Deutsch (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019), 463–497. See also Tova Ganzel and Shalom E. Holtz, “Ezekiel's Temple in Babylonian Context,” *Vetus Testamentum* 64 (2014): 225–226: “The prophet describes a temple whose architecture and organization resemble those of temples contemporary with and geographically most proximate to the prophet's stated time and place. The very description in the Book of Ezekiel, with its emphasis on gates, walls and courtyards, shows a perception of the temple quite similar to that observed in Babylonian topographical texts. Still more significant than the surface similarities, however, are the demonstrable ideological commonalities, reflected in the arrangement of space and the deployment of personnel within that space. Ezekiel explicitly expresses a concern with erecting barriers between humans and deities in order to preserve sanctity. Studies of the full range of available records show that Neo-Babylonian temples shared this concern. We cannot say with any certainty that Ezekiel borrowed these features from his environment. We may say, however, that Ezekiel and his audience might have understood the plan for the rebuilt temple by looking to their surroundings. They had, in short, a working model not too far from their homes in exile.”

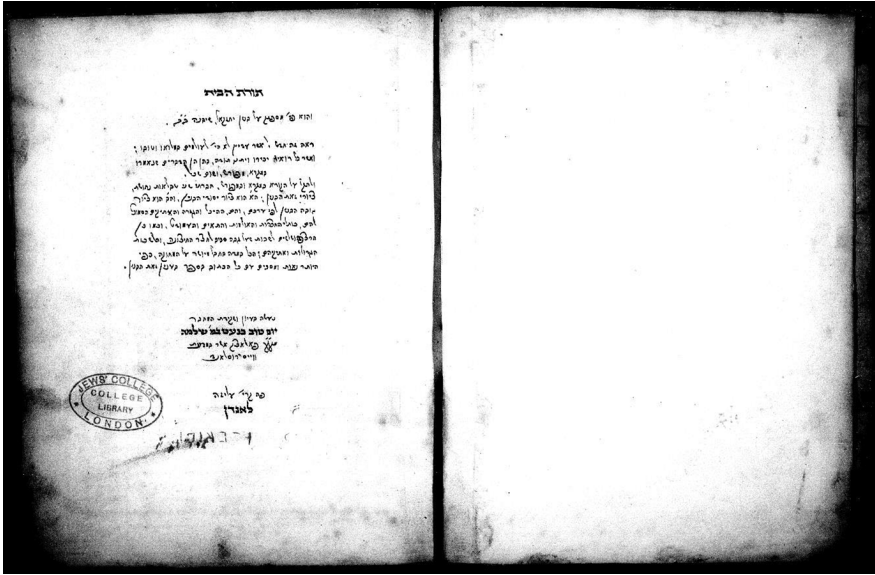


Figure 6.2: The first page of *Torat Ha-Bayit*.

nance.” Searching near and far for the source of this light, he ultimately realized that this spirit came from the West, which had reached the pinnacle of culture in the world. He left to wander to these Western lands to learn from their scholars, to gain from *Yaldei zarim* – literally, “the children of foreigners,” as he calls them. He was able to actualize his ambitions to become an engraver in the Western academies and in those places where the Jews were treated well. Nevertheless, he was burdened by the economic challenges of earning a living, having limited time and energy. But he felt the obligation to engage in Torah study. In London, he published a book in English called *Neṣaḥ Yisrael (The Constancy of Israel)*, arguing with the Christians on their misrepresentations of religion. He pointed out their mistakes and misunderstandings in their translations of the Bible, both those that were intentional, bringing the text into agreement with their theological principles, and those based on inadequate knowledge of Hebrew: “I proved from our rabbis and from the scholars of the nations that their teachings were false; the diffusion of their religion among the nations was based on lies and inferior views and based on nothingness.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 3.

Having contextualized this present composition against the background of his previous experiences with Christian culture, he turns to explain his particular interest in the Temple of Ezekiel:

When I read their commentaries, I saw how many mistakes they made in translating the text [. . .] missing the simple and obvious meaning of the original text. They saw in them mysteries, explaining the text as wondrous and hidden beyond all human comprehension, interpreting the hidden with more hiddenness, with a figurative meaning. They interpreted the Temple as referring to Jesus their messiah because he himself is the sanctuary; he is the high priest; and he is the pascal offering that atones for them. [. . .] And this is the great Temple which the nations seek.¹⁷

Bennett concludes that this Christian view was ultimately based on a Jewish understanding of the Second Temple period, a period of warfare and destruction – especially the destruction of the Temple by the Romans and the dispersion of the Jews, which the Jews understood as a punishment for their sins. The Christians thus concluded that the prophecy of Ezekiel and the building of his Temple were meant for a future time. Following these standard Jewish interpretations, Christians concluded that Ezekiel's vision of the Temple was a secret and spiritual one, neither material nor actual. Given this false understanding, Bennett had no other alternative but to explain the true meaning of the text:

Who could imagine such a teaching? The goyim have transformed the words of the living God into nonsense and vanities and inferior teachings, defining clear light with counterfeit and meaningless views, irrational and unnatural. I then decided to gird my loins to destroy the mistakes of the young lions who wrest the text of its simple meaning. I composed and published my own work on the Temple of Ezekiel in English with two engravings to straighten the crooked heart, to show a straight path of the truthful religion from the time Israel was one people on the land. After I published the text in English, I was approached by acquaintances from my own people who asked me to compose the book with the copper engravings in Hebrew for the benefit of my people in other lands who do not know English and especially for Jews living in Poland for whom the word of God is precious in their eyes and who will appreciate this publication.¹⁸

But at first thought, Bennett was quite intimidated by the idea of composing a commentary, given the prior works by great sages such as Rashi and Tosephot Yom Tov (Yom Tov Lipmann Heller) and his work *Zurat Ha-Bayit*, which he considered truly superior to his own:

¹⁷ Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 3.

¹⁸ Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 3–4.

Who am I to wear a *tallit* [prayer shawl] that is not mine and to intrude myself among holy commentators? Who am I, a person who is preoccupied with material pursuits and intellectual crafts, burdened with the encumbrances of time to earn a living, to assume to make use of the crown of the Torah? The sages tell us that our fathers left us a place to distinguish ourselves and we have a part and an inheritance in God's Torah, to show wisdom and to explicate the hidden. This is particularly true for a subject like this not particularly based on reasons and speculations or on ancient traditions, but rather on pictorial, figurative insight [*hasagah ziyurit*] in this building craft so that it can be correlated with all that is written in the text. One who lacks knowledge of the science of building [architecture] or one lacking a picture or a plan of the building drawn with all its specifications with the correct measurements in miniature, the literal meaning of the text will be hidden from him.¹⁹

In examining the commentaries of others, he discovered that all who wrote on the Temple of Ezekiel lacked this specific understanding: the more they wrote, the more the truth eluded them, since

it depends not on multiple references or good prose but a *habatah ziyurit* [a pictorial observation, gaze] across its length and width. It is in the nature of the perception of the senses that they easily and carefully convey the perceptible [*hamuhash*], which make an impression as an idea and permanently recalls what it saw as if it were before one's eyes, built magnificently. [. . .] So even though Rashi and Tosephot Yom Tov had a theoretical understanding regarding the Temple, they lacked a practical understanding; they could not present an appropriate image through the strength of their research to make it easier for the reader to understand the text. So, the reader could not make a precise impression of what he was reading. Rashi also confused more by bringing new and old versions whose reliability was impossible to discern. He even admitted in places that he did not fully understand.²⁰

Bennett's qualifications for this specific task were now obvious: "Since I acquired my reputation in the craft of art and copper engraving with a partial knowledge of architecture, I declared accordingly that it was the time to do God's work to provide support for the Torah, especially regarding the appearance of Ezekiel's Temple. I soon discovered that all of Ezekiel's revelation is based on the foundations of the science of architecture completely with respect to all its details." He thus felt commanded to pick up a pen to make the observations that align with the text through his commentary and the two engravings he had prepared. The first is a basic illustration – a ground-view: that is, a picture of all the foundations of the building, the sanctuary, the beams, the walls of the courtyards, the halls, offices, gates, floor of the surrounding courtyard, its length and width and its appropriate measurements according to the meaning of the biblical text. He identifies the various parts with the designations A, B, C, etc. The second engraving is a

¹⁹ Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 4.

²⁰ Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 4.

bird's-eye view, looking down at all the details of the building, the floors and galleries and so on, which would not be visible to one standing on the ground rather than in the sky (see figure 6.3).²¹ Through this image, the reader gains a perspective regarding the text unavailable to Rashi.

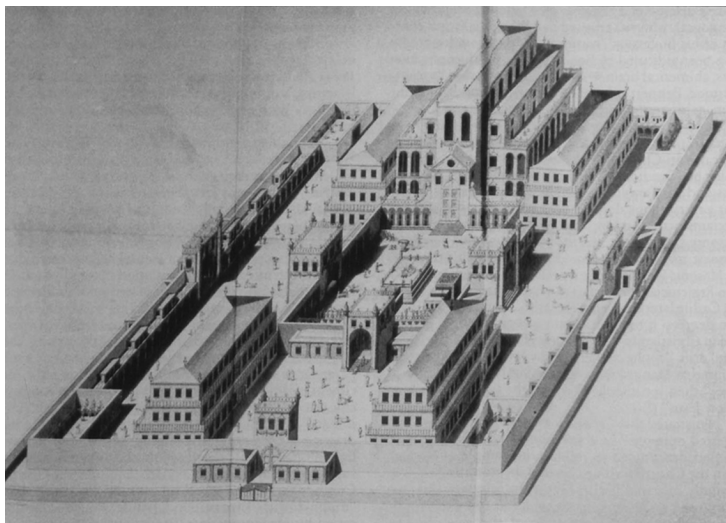


Figure 6.3: A bird's-eye view of the Temple of Ezekiel, engraved by Bennett.

Bennett, in this Hebrew version, expands his remarks on the real purpose of Ezekiel's Temple plan. Ezekiel's vision was the same as the actual Second Temple. The sanctuary, its sequestered space, and its magnificent walls were created in the image of Ezekiel's plan, as explained by the rabbis in Tractate *Middot*. The scholars of the Mishnah described what they learned from the men of the great assembly who testified to what they saw authentically, testimony upon which Rashi and Tosephot Yom Tov relied in writing their commentaries. Similarly, Bennett adds: "I follow them when they are right based on the same information. If their interpretations are forced or incorrect, I will interpret according to my own opinion to conform with the text."²²

However, it is evident that the Second Temple was not fully completed according to Ezekiel's plan. The men of the great assembly who built the Temple were in touch with the last prophets – Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zachariah, and

²¹ Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 4–5.

²² Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 5.

Malachi – and knew and spoke with Ezekiel about the redemption and the return to the land of Israel, the rebuilding of the Temple, and matters of state. It was because of the generosity of Cyrus the king of Persia that forty-two thousand exiles returned. They were not wealthy enough to carry out elaborate plans of temple building; the affluent remained in Persia. So, the men of the great assembly decided to use the resources they had from Cyrus sparingly, not creating a temple exactly according to Ezekiel's plan but focusing only on its essentials. They decided to defer the rest for a later time, when their borders were extended and they were economically able to enlarge and enhance the building to follow Ezekiel's specifications.

Over time the Palestinian community grew and flourished, building fortresses and towers and acquiring instruments of war, such as bows and shields and armor, helmets, and artillery. Wars broke out more frequently between the children of Israel and the kings to the east and west, north and south, and for this reason, the community was in no position to improve the original building they had erected. "But there is no doubt," Bennett concludes, "that God will ultimately redeem his people, as he has done in the past, at the end of days, rebuilding the complete Temple and the original borders of the Holy Land."²³

Bennett adds one additional note to clarify his approach in composing his commentary: "The reader might ask how this author decided to provide measurements with respect to all the walls, compartments, and buildings even when they are not stipulated in the biblical text itself. At first glance, the reader might conclude that this is only a *ẓiyur ra'ayoni* [an idealized projection] but not truly and essentially reflecting the reality of the text. Since these numbers are not offered in the text, he might assume they are merely the projections of sophists having no basis."²⁴

He makes two cogent responses to these doubts. First, he explains that all we know for sure is what is described in Tractate *Middot*, which was only a modest version of Ezekiel's larger vision:

These measurements can be ascertained for the parts they describe; for the rest, we are entitled to interpret as much as possible, following the biblical text and relying on our opinion rather than that of others. This is the major mistake of previous exegetes who tried to equate what they read in Ezekiel with the descriptions in the Mishnah, or added their speculations based on their own imaginations. [. . .] Second, even if the biblical text does not give us precise measurements of the walls and chambers of the Temple, we follow two principles. The first, that since we notice that the measurements Ezekiel gives of the Temple foundations are accurate and proportional to that accepted by the art of architecture, it appears justified to

²³ Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 5–6.

²⁴ Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 7.

offer a proportional measuring for the offices and chambers following those offered for the areas of the buildings, big when appropriate or small, even when it is not mentioned explicitly. And second, since we are given certain measurements in the text such as the height of entrances, the halls, the four large offices, and the wings of the buildings, we are entitled to infer the hidden from the explicit. We are permitted to offer measurements of the parts of the Temple not mentioned in the text so the entire building and its area will be perceived accurately as a whole, symmetrical and proportional.²⁵

Thus ends the Hebrew version of the preface, a remarkable elaboration of the English meant to justify his innovations before his learned Hebrew readers steeped in previous Jewish exegesis on the Temple. In spelling out his approach to the text, he vigorously defends the English version of his commentary as a much-needed corrective to the misconceptions and distortions of the biblical text offered by ignorant and theologically biased Christian commentators. But in writing in Hebrew to his co-religionists, he makes a supreme effort to justify his standing as a layperson, not a rabbi, and to bolster his credentials in understanding a text well commented upon by Hebraic scholars seemingly more learned than he is. In London, he faced a somewhat lesser challenge to present himself as a legitimate scholar before Christian Hebraists with limited linguistic skills or before a community of uneducated Jews he did not appreciate nor respect. In choosing to make the same arguments in Hebrew, he understood that the bar was higher to demonstrate his profundity and originality.

Ironically, it is in this Hebrew text never published and probably never examined by more than a handful of readers that Bennett articulates his most significant reflection on being simultaneously an artist and a Hebraic scholar and on how the two identities can engage each other in meaningful collaboration and dialogue. Bennett admits he cannot surpass the erudition of his exegetical predecessors, but he can offer a unique perspective on the Temple because of his *hasagah ziyurit* or figurative insight, his architectural background, his sense of proportion and measurement, and his practical ability to visualize a text as one conceives a picture, drawing, or engraving. This artistic sense can already be appreciated in his previous work on Solomon's plumbing system of the Temple, *The Molten Sea*, which I describe briefly in appendix I of this book. His commentary on Ezekiel's Temple is surely a direct continuation of this modest work published three years earlier, demonstrating his intense interest in visualizing the architectural and the mechanical details of the Hebrew Bible. Together with his deep obsession with reading the text literally and accurately, free of grammatical mistakes and theological distortions, Bennett locates in these pages precisely how his

25 Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 7–8.

professional and personal pursuits of a Jewish intellectual living in virtual isolation from his homeland could creatively merge, and how the visual could profoundly reveal the literal biblical truth.

6.3 The commentary and its legacy

Bennett's actual commentary on chapters 40–43, in both its English and Hebrew versions, is less noteworthy than are the prefaces. He reiterates a theme also found in his other works on the splendor of the culture of the Second Temple in contrast to that of the First. He again makes his general claim, in reference to Ezekiel 40:27, that “even though the text doesn’t stipulate the measurement of the walls of the courtyard and the chambers, we can calculate them based on the proportion and the symmetry of the sides.” He carefully correlates the information in the text with that provided in the Mishnaic Tractate *Middot*, as, for example, on Ezekiel 40:46: “As we are told in Mishnah (Midot) that the second Temple was to a certain degree an imitation of that of Ezekiel, particularly in its principal parts, such as the porch before the Temple, the holy of holies, and the adjoining cells, which exactly resemble those before us.” He openly challenges the interpretations of Rashi and Lipmann Heller on several passages, and refutes Gill, Calmet, and Stackhouse, as well.²⁶

Bennett waxes eloquent (in both English and Hebrew) on the two faces, the human and the lion, of the cherubim in Ezekiel 41:19, which represent a union of ferocity and mildness:

the wonderful combination of the two *extreme* qualities of the human essence, viz. the extreme ferocity of the *animal* quality, or *nature*, and the mildness of its divine intellect, which, from being naturally in opposition to each other, and scarcely compatible, evince the more forcibly in their union the *divine and supernatural power or essence* by which they are combined; as well as that nature itself is also *sacred*, when preserved in its bounds; and both are thought worthy the attention of their creator.²⁷

In his extensive notes on chapter 43, he reviews the entire history of the First and Second Temple periods, bemoaning the corruption of the Israelite monarchs in the former and extolling the return to a spiritual renaissance in the latter. In the later period, the government of people of Israel became a pure commonwealth while “Hebrew literature began to flourish and to illumine the less enlightened generations of the world, in matters of religion and morality, as well as science.”

²⁶ Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 23, 27, 46, 47, 49, 68; Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 12, 15.

²⁷ Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 62; Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 24.

He is also emphatic in disagreeing with Maimonides, indeed all rabbis, who claim that appointing a king over Israel was a divine commandment: “[. . .] I will boldly assert, in contradiction to any Rabbinical commentary whatever on that point,” that their enactments “were not a *kabbalah me-avoteinu* [a tradition of our ancestors],” not from Sinai nor from the first prophets nor the later ones; “royalty was inconsistent with the essential government of the house of Israel.” And once again: “I must again repeat, that the opinions of the former Rabbies and commentators are of no weight with me, *when regarding* the kings of Israel, and in particular those of the house of David[; . . .] for to me, one word of biblical and historical truth is more acceptable than volumes of sophistry and cavil.”²⁸

In the Hebrew version, Bennett repeats his abhorrence of the Israelite monarchy, while adding a final “English” touch that might have surprised his Hebrew readers had they ever had the opportunity to study his words: “during the Second Temple period there was no absolute monarchy but rather a mixed monarchy [*murkhevet*] like the monarchy of England that exists today[; . . .] the king cannot do anything without permission of Parliament. [. . .] Thus, during the Hasmonean era, the country was ruled by the Sanhedrin. Accordingly, the Second Temple is equivalent to the English system.”²⁹

Before concluding his commentary with some brief remarks on the two engravings of the Temple he had created, Bennett inserts the following sentence, meant perhaps to be conciliatory but appearing, nevertheless, to be provocative: “Although the explanation of the visionary Temple of Ezekiel upon scientific principles may be objectionable to some orthodox Jews or Christians, who prefer the mystical to the rational, especially in scriptural matters; yet, I think myself warranted in maintaining, that, as the prophets (independently of their divine inspiration) were able politicians and men of science, we are not required to lay reason aside, more especially since the text itself is simple, clear, and obvious.”³⁰

A new Jewish commentary based “upon scientific principles” and crafted by an author capable of offending pious Jews and Christians alike was not to go unnoticed; but neither would it cause a sensation within either the Jewish or the Christian communities. Most Jews hardly knew of the work, since the Hebrew version was never published. Bennett never really found the opportunity to make his case to his own co-religionists that his commentary was a real contribution to Hebrew exegesis and literature, written from the perspective of an artist/engraver. He also never had the chance to demonstrate the value of his hybrid

²⁸ Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 84, 88, 89–90.

²⁹ Bennett, *Torat ha-Bayit*, 32.

³⁰ Bennett, *The Temple of Ezekiel*, 110.

literary creation that was written in a fluent and rich Hebrew style and that drew from traditional exegesis while marked by a scientific approach to architectural and aesthetic principles. Moreover, he could not claim to other learned Jews that he had put his knowledge of history and linguistics to good use to vanquish his Christian opponents.

On the other hand, Bennett's work was "seen" in the Christian literary world of London. Either Bennett himself or his publishers had inserted multiple notices of the book's imminent appearance in a wide range of literary journals. It also appeared conspicuously in various dictionaries and encyclopedia dealing with biblical and religious subjects throughout the nineteenth century. The book found its way to prominent libraries, such as those of the Royal Asiatic Society, the famous architect Sir John Soane, and the Duke of Sussex.³¹ I have yet to locate a serious review of the book in English journals, such as appeared when Bennett's first book, *The Constancy of Israel*, was published. This must have been disappointing to the author, as the book had initially enjoyed moral and financial support from both Christians and Jews, and because Bennett had written an original and thought-provoking tome. Bennett certainly knew that this was a work that deserved a wider readership beyond the British Isles. Alas, his completed Hebrew manuscript did not see the light of day as a published book, despite his obvious efforts to have it included on the Jewish bookshelf. Only the modern reader can now marvel at his bold attempt to write as a foreigner in the English language to a Protestant readership and then translate his biblical scholarship into the literary language of Polish Jewry.

31 A sampling of notices on the publication of *The Temple of Ezekiel* includes *The Gentleman's Magazine or Monthly Intelligence* 135 (1824): 165; *The London Christian Instructor or Congregational Magazine* VII (1824): 168; *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 15 (1824): 478; *The Repository of Arts, Literature, Fashions, Manufactures* 3 (1824): 185; *The Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature* 19 (1824): 187; *Critica Biblica*, 4 vols. (London: William Booth, 1827), 2:142; *The Eclectic Review*, n.s., 21 (1824): 287; *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 4 (January 1837): x; *Catalogue of the Library: Sir John Soane's Museum* (London: Wyman and Sons, 1878), 35; *Biblioteca Sussexiana*, part 1, *Theology* (London: Evans, 1844), 132; *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, ed. Thomas Hartwell Horne, Samuel Davidson, and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, 10th edn., vol. 2 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, and Roberts, 1856), 902; and John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of Ezekiel*, trans. Thomas Myers, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1850), 352.