

Appendix I: Two Early Treatises of Solomon Bennett

I.1 *A Discourse on Sacrifices* (1815)

In the wake of the modest success of his first book, Bennett published another polemical work against Christian exegesis of the Hebrew Bible, focusing exclusively on the place of sacrifices in Judaism and Christianity. Dedicated to his long-term friend and supporter Morris Solomon of Amsterdam, it opens with an apologetic clarification as to why the author had devoted an entire treatise to this one issue:

The Discourse I am now laying before you may appear at the first sight paradoxical, or as a sophistry designed to disparage a system generally and universally adopted and promulgated. Yet, as I do not advance in it anything but that which is sanctioned by Scripture; and in addition by the authority of those Rabbies of the Mishnah who existed during the period of the second Temple, anterior to the Christian era, and who accordingly cannot be charged with religious prejudices; so I hope that you will not be too hasty in your judgement and conclusion, until you shall have thoroughly perused the same, and well digested it.¹

Notwithstanding his confession of innocence in following Scripture alone without promoting any ideological agenda, Bennett was in fact boldly addressing a centerpiece of Christian theology, one that rested on a particular understanding of the sacrificial system of Judaism that he wished to refute. He thus continues:

Numberless volumes are written by the doctors of the Christian church, to prove that the order of the sacrifices were absolute commandments, and that no remission of sins can be obtained by the Divine mercy alone, unless by the additional gift, viz. the shedding of animal blood, and the whole process of the sacrifice as described in the Bible. The church carried this point still further [. . .] that to obtain a general and an universal salvation, either for the past, or future generations, and forgiveness of their general (like those of Adam and Eve) or individual transgressions, the Divine wisdom thought proper to send into this mortal world, in a space of about 3700 years after the Creation, a Son of his own, and in a peculiar mode, which was Jesus the messiah, to shed his innocent blood, so as to make an universal atonement for all his adherents.²

¹ Solomon Bennett, “To the Reader,” in *A Discourse on Sacrifices* (London: published and sold by the author, 1815), opening page. On Morris Solomon of Amsterdam, see above, chapter 6, note 6.

² Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 1–2.

In other words, Christian theologians demanded a literal and binding commitment to animal sacrifice as described in Scripture to make sense of Jesus's ultimate sacrifice and his atonement for humanity's sins.

To make his point more relevant to the ambience of English Protestantism of his day, Bennett chose to mention the well-known biblical commentary of the Methodist scholar Adam Clarke (1762–1832), a figure he had already singled out for ridicule in *The Constancy of Israel* for Clarke's English translation of a small work on ancient Israel by Claude Fleury (see chapter 2, above). It is obvious Bennett could not countenance the constant typological exegesis that this clergyman was fond of using, without regard to the actual literal meaning of the biblical text:

That miraculous divine the Rev. Dr. A. Clarke in his bombastic comment on the Pentateuch has not been sparing in asserting this doctrine [regarding the sacrifices]. Thus I observe this master of types, in his comment on Genesis, typifying all the Angels, the Patriarchs, the matrons, showing all to have been types of Jesus the Messiah; and in Leviticus I saw him with the same eagerness and facility of argument, make the Tabernacle with all its utensils, but in particular all the Sacrifices, either of the animal species, or cookeries, pan-cakes, and libations, all to have been equally types of the great sacrifice, viz. the Messiah. In short, this divine deprived the Israelites of everything peculiar to their own history and national establishment, so as to make the whole of it but as a mere cypher, an allusion to something else, beyond it.³

The last sentence is particularly telling, laying bare the essential object of a Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible: to deprive Jews of their own history and culture by superimposing on them a theological meaning alien to their original intention.

In the same category as Clarke, Bennett contended, was his Christian contemporary John Bellamy (1755–1842), another well-known translator of and commentator on the Hebrew Bible for whom Bennett had nothing but contempt. There is

³ Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 2–3. On Fleury and Clarke, 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), 209–211n, and above, chapter 2, note 34. See also Stephen B. Dawes, *Adam Clarke: Methodism's First Old Testament Scholar*, Cornish Methodist Historical Association Occasional Publication 26 (Truro, England: Cornish Methodist Historical Association, 1994); Papers of Dr Adam Clarke, University of Manchester Library, Manchester, UK, catalogued at <http://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb133-plp>; Simon Mayers, "Representations of 'the Jews' in Methodist Discourses: Report Based on a Brief Visit to the Methodist Archives and Research Centre," August 25, 2014, available at <https://static1.l.sqspcdn.com/static/f/784513/27385906/1482318882317/background-mayers.pdf?token=8H90dl5abkmSoGCYjsbSFsX90bM%3D>; and Ian Sellers, "Clarke, Adam (1762–1832)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, October 10, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5483>.

a certain irony that he cited Bellamy together with Clarke, since Bellamy had proclaimed himself a great scholar of the Hebrew language, a critic of the standard translation of the Hebrew Bible, and the author of his own allegedly superior translation. He had also mocked Clarke's scholarship in bolstering his own. In Bennett's estimation, Bellamy was not only ignorant of the Hebrew language but was even more fraudulent than Clarke in his scholarly claims. As we have seen in chapter 8 above, Bennett knew him personally, had conversed and instructed him on several occasions, and ultimately discovered that Bellamy had plagiarized him. Moreover, Bennett's Jewish contemporary, Hyman Hurwitz, whose entanglement with Bennett was discussed above in chapter 7, would devote an entire publication to exposing Bellamy's faulty biblical scholarship as well.⁴

Bennett cites from an advertisement of a work by Bellamy titled *The History of All Religions* (1812), which was supposedly a new work:

It is indeed new, and strange too. He presents us further with a sample of his work, (like corn-dealers) evidently meaning to show the best part of the production [. . .] and concludes thus [on Cain and Abel]: "Now, as Sacrifices as well as offering were commanded [. . .] and as nothing was acceptable without the Sacrifice, had Cain obeyed the divine command, had he brought his sacrifice [. . .] and had he believed in the promise of God to redeem men by the coming of the Messiah, who was to be the great Sacrifice, as all sacrifices were to be terminated in him; his offering would have been accepted. But Abel's offer was accepted since he believed in the promise of Christ.

Bennett concludes that he will "leave it to the judgment of literary gentlemen far superior to mine, and who may judge for themselves, upon a prepossessed, preposterous jargon (to my understanding) like this." What is clear from the examples of Clarke's and Bellamy's exegesis is that sacrifice is a fundamental doctrine of the Trinitarian creed, and since "Jews now don't have sacrifices, nor the Great Sacrifice, the lamb of God, [they] must then remain without any salvation whatever."⁵

4 Bellamy's work against Clarke is called *The Ophion: or, The Theology of the Serpent* (London: sold by Hatchard, Williams, and Arch, 1811). Hyman Hurwitz wrote a work defending Hebrew Scriptures against John Bellamy called *Vindiciae Hebraicae: or, A Defence of the Hebrew Scriptures as a Vehicle of Revealed Religion as Occasioned by the Recent Strictures and Innovations of J. Bellamy; and in Confutation of His Attacks on all preceding Translations, and on the Established Version in Particular* (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1829). On Bellamy, see Sue Young, "John Bellamy 1755–1842," *Sue Young Histories*, August 16, 2012, <https://www.sueyounghistories.com/2012-08-16-john-bellamy-1755-1842>; and see chapter 8, above.

5 Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 4–6.

It is at this juncture that Bennett offers his own hypothesis, drawn from his unpublished manuscript titled *Amot Mikrei Kodesh*, or “The Validity of the Hebrew Text,” containing

48 examinations, presenting the most glaring errors and pedantisms of Drs. [Benjamin] Kennicott, [Giovanni Bernardo] de Rossi, etc.,⁶ and our present eminent divine Ad. Clarke on the Pentateuch only; who, with their usual arrogance, and the prejudices peculiar to Christian divines, charged the long standing and sanctioned validity of the same with omissions, interpolations, transpositions, and changeabilities; I say again, error, which an Israelite schoolboy would not be guilty of.⁷

In his twenty-fifth examination, Bennett offers the following theses: that the primitive institution of sacrifices was not invented for remission of sins; that the shedding of animal blood was not essential for remission of sin; and that the commandments of sacrifices were not absolute or essential for human salvation. They were ceremonial, local, and temporal. The patriarchs, Bennett contended, saw sacrifices as voluntary gifts, tokens of gratitude and obedience toward the universal benefactor and never as intended for remission of sins. The priests later corrupted the practice whereby “sacrifices became a system subject to the whims and caprices of priests, and a very productive income to them; but to intelligent minds, it appeared in a most degrading state.” Although the general practice of sacrifices was not abolished, it was “reduced to free will gifts, thanks and peace offerings, and duty offerings, sin and guilt offerings”—that is, made only to God and limited to Palestine and Jerusalem and to the tribe of Levi. Furthermore, contended Bennett, the book of Leviticus never required sacrifices for the remission of sin. And this notion was reinforced by the prophets, who declared that the whole system of sacrifices was neither essential to salvation nor an absolute commandment. The rabbis of the Mishnah also insisted that sacrifices were local and temporal, applicable only to commandments connected to the land of Israel. All this evidence strongly suggests to Bennett that sacrifices were limited to a specific class, to a specific place, and to a specific time.⁸

In closing his modest work, Bennett takes one more jab at Adam Clarke, this time linking him directly to the Christian missionaries of the London Society he so detested:

6 On Kennicott, see David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), chap. 1; on de Rossi, see F. F. Parente, “De Rossi, Giovanni Bernardo,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 39, ed. Vincenzo Cappelletti (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1999), at https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/de-rossi-giovanni-bernardo_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/.

7 Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 7.

8 Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 7–18; quotations, 9, 11.

As I was informed of the candour of the eminent divine Dr. Adam Clarke, who conceitedly and arrogantly expressed himself at a meeting of the ci-devant nefarious and infatuated London Society for the universal conversion of the Jews, by saying that there is not one Jew who knows the Hebrew language, and the literature thereof; and likewise the arrogance, the absurdities and sarcasms with which to my knowledge his bombastic comment on the Pentateuch is filled; I therefore loudly call upon him, as the guide and light of his time, to take into consideration, and refute if he be able, the objections I have made in this my Discourse; and I shall be obliged to him for a reconciliation of the texts, and better information respecting the doctrine of Sacrifices.⁹

Bennett was, of course, aware that his claim that the sacrifices were not an essential part of biblical religion or of ancient rabbinic civilization but were necessary for Christians to perpetuate their doctrine of the shedding of the blood of Lamb of God would be unconvincing to many Jews and Christians alike. As he observes, “Many Hebrew Rabbies as well as the Rabbies of the Christian church, being amateurs of hypotheses (which they call by the name of mysteries) will not so easily give ear to my dissertation”; nevertheless, he appeals “to the sacred text itself and to the purity of sacred reason.”¹⁰

One unnamed Christian reader, writing in *The Jewish Expositor and the Friend of Israel*, a periodical of the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews, responded to Bennett in a lengthy and learned essay, offering a full refutation of Bennett’s three theses, which he based on passages from Scripture (especially from the book of Leviticus), the Targumim, and even the Jewish exegete David Kimḥi. This was indeed a tour de force, punching holes in the hypothesis that sacrifices were unessential to the practice of biblical religion. How ironic that a textual scholar such as Bennett, committed to the literal meaning of Scripture, would dare take such liberties with the plain meaning of the Bible to marginalize the sacrificial system of the Temple and the priests and see their emphasis as a distortion of ancient Judaism. Even the prophets and the psalmist, with all their emphasis on moral intention over external ritual, never imagined abolishing the observance of sacrifices altogether. So, for example, this author comments on Psalm 51:16 (“Thou desirest not sacrifice [. . .] Thou delightest not in burnt offerings”): “But if we regard David an inspired person, we ought to interpret his language by his own conduct, and we shall see, that when he says, God desirest not sacrifices nor takes delight in burnt offerings, he means those

9 Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 21. A proposal for publishing by subscription “the Work long since advertised by me intitled *Amot Mikrei Kodesh* The Validity of the Hebrew Text” immediately follows. The work was never published with this title but might have served as the foundation for Bennett’s discourse on the Hebrew language discussed in chapter 7, above.

10 Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 19.

sacrifices which the carnal Israelites vainly and impiously imagined would be accepted [. . .] and he thus shews, that sacrifices are of no avail, unless accompanied with a contrite and broken heart.” But sacrifice with proper conviction and moral conduct remained unambiguously intact.¹¹

Of course, Bennett was audaciously attempting to decouple the doctrine of sacrifice as expiation for sin from the myth of Jesus’s ultimate sacrifice for humanity, a task like that of his older Jewish contemporaries David Levi and Joseph Crool, both mentioned by his critic. If correct, Bennett could argue that the Christian dogma rested on weak and untenable foundations. But this reader would have none of it: and using an abundance of proof passages to argue for the validity of the Christian reading of Scripture on this point, he certainly pushed back on Bennett’s daring hypothesis. Clarke and Bellamy might have been easy targets to demolish, but not the author of this review, favorably reprinted in a later collection of essays from *The Jewish Expositor*.¹² In two other reviews of Bennett’s work, one allegedly written by a Jew or a former Jew, Bennett faced similar criticism of his reading of the Hebrew notion of sacrifices and even an apparently irrelevant accusation about his personal observance of Jewish ritual—a charge, as we have seen, made against him on several occasions.¹³ In his own typically bombastic manner, he vigorously defended his own position, surely in line with the views of previous generations of diasporic Jews. The doctrine of actual animal sacrifice, so he claimed, has always been more critical to Christians than to Jews, owing to Jesus’s central sacrificial role in bearing the sins of humanity. In this claim, Bennett was conveying a significant historical truth by delineating carefully the two faiths of his day.¹⁴

11 “Opinions of Modern Jews on Sacrifices,” *The Jewish Expositor and Friend of Israel* 1 (December 1816): 401–414; quotation, 411.

12 On David Levi, see Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, index, s.v. “Levi, David.” On Joseph Crool, see David S. Katz, *The Jews in the History of England, 1484–1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 377–379. The review was reprinted in William Cuninghame, ed., *Letters and Essays Controversial and Critical on Subjects Connected with Conversion and National Restoration of Israel* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1822), 145–168.

13 “A Discourse on Sacrifices,” *Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature* 12 (March 2, 1817): 219–223; “A Discourse on Sacrifices,” *New Evangelical Magazine and Review* 3 (April 1817): 123–124.

14 Bennett, *A Discourse on Sacrifices*, 20–21, ending with a further assault on Adam Clarke.

I.2 On *The Molten Sea* [Yam shel Shlomo] (1821)

Three years before publishing his commentary on the Temple of Ezekiel, Bennett put out a similar work of detailed mechanical and architectural description called *The Molten Sea*, a commentary, following 1 Kings 7, on the system of collecting and distributing water throughout the Temple. The text was preceded by another elaborate engraving prepared by the author depicting the unusual system conceived by Solomon (see Figure I.1).¹⁵ This earlier work is undoubtedly related in style and content to the Ezekiel publication and might be deemed a precursor to it.

Bennett presents himself on the title page as Solomon Bennett, a member of the Royal Academy of Berlin, a title he obviously cherished and held on to even after two decades in London. The volume is dedicated to his good friend the Unitarian minister and political leader William Frend, who came to his financial aid at a time of crisis and demonstrated his appreciation of Bennett's Jewish learning: "you are not only a zealous advocate for literary pursuits, but an excellent judge of them; it is before your face, therefore, that I am to lay my little dissertation entitled, 'The Molten Sea,' which you will please to accept as an *Kurban todah*, offer of confession, from your devoted and sincere friend, the author."¹⁶

Bennett had consulted several Christian commentators on the chapter, especially Johann Jakob Scheuchzer's *Physica Sacra* (1731–1735), as well as *Calmet's Dictionary of the Holy Bible*, first edited and published in 1797 by Charles Taylor. Bennett finds these works lacking:

I give them credit for their endeavours but little is due to their comments on scripture. They paid attention to the twelve oxen [holding up the water reservoir], but overlooked the vessel itself, which is the chief object in this structure, as the essential part for the service of the Temple; I mean to say, that they did not pay any attention whatsoever to the dimensions given in the text of that colossal vessel; they did not examine whether the vacuums of their supposed forms would be competent for the reception of that quantity of water allotted to it in the text, or not; they did not observe the impropriety in the standing version of that subject, which [. . .] should have been the chief point of their researches.¹⁷

As in his work on Ezekiel's Temple, the focus is on the mechanical details and how the structure was conceived. And much as in the later book, he first points to

¹⁵ Solomon Bennett, *The Molten Sea* (London: published by the author and sold by J. Hatchard and Son, 1821). On the Hatchard publishing house, see "J. Hatchard and Son," *Open Library*, https://openlibrary.org/publishers/J._Hatchard_and_Son.

¹⁶ Bennett, *The Molten Sea*, 6, dedication page.

¹⁷ Bennett, *The Molten Sea*, 7.

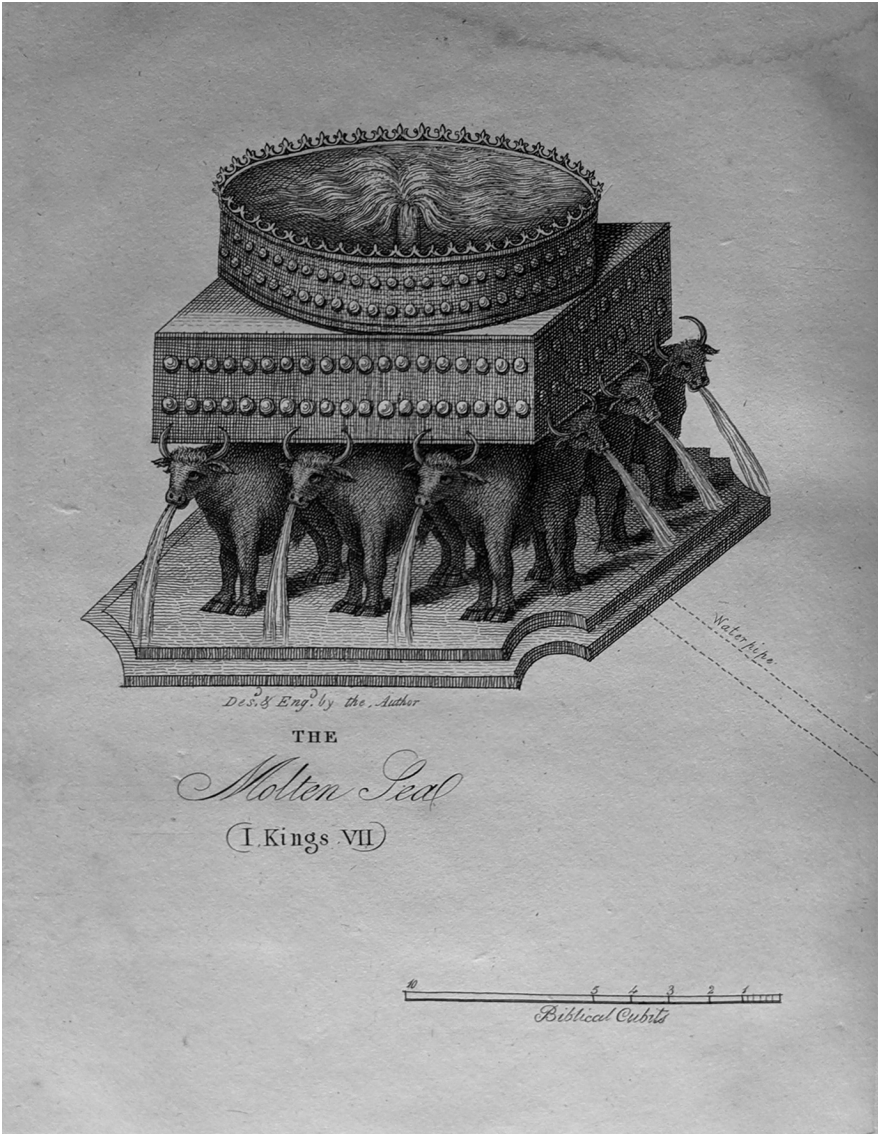


Figure I.1: Bennett's engraving of the Molten Sea, published in his book *The Molten Sea* (London, 1821).

the engraving that he designed to illustrate the proper form of the Molten Sea, and to prove that the knowledge he acquired came from the rabbis, not from recent scholars:

because the author is not dubbed with the titles of Reverend, Esq., the initials D.D., etc.; but above all, because the author is a Jew!!! Which prejudices I experienced daily, though prevalent now a-day. To which I answer, as, to the first opinion, *Mikrah ani doresh*, I appeal to the text! Which is in behalf of my assertion; that the rabbies were nearer to that sacred period than modern bibliographers; and as one astronomical gentleman [i.e., William Frend] conscientiously testified in a work of his, entitled *Evening Amusements for the Year 1817* (page 162) saying, “This nation (alluding to the Hebrews) was well acquainted with the motion of the sun and moon long before the Greeks had emerged from their barbarous state,” etc. So, I am to add, that the rabbies were as well acquainted with mathematics, long before the Christian world had a knowledge of it; and as all is treated in it, scientific and problematical, no man can dispute its authority [. . .] because its waters issue from the sanctuary [Ezek. 47:2].¹⁸

Bennett later responds to the charge that Solomon had no knowledge of geometry and could not properly calculate the measurements of this huge vessel: “If he was deficient in geometry, he was not deficient in ocular demonstrations, particularly when he had the mass-staff and line in his hand, with which he measured the building of the Temple and all the utensils of the same. [. . .] [One has] no right to attribute to Solomon a gross deficiency of mathematical knowledge—especially since he possessed the art of building, including Baalbek and Palmira.” The real deficiency lies in the limited knowledge of Christian exegetes who lack sufficient literacy in Hebrew as well as rabbinics, “without which, many obscurities in scripture must infallibly remain unanswered.”¹⁹

Bennett reiterates his main point at the conclusion of his short excursus:

Having brought the above subject to a concise termination as well as a reconciliation of the text, does it remain any doubt that the king Solomon had a sufficient knowledge of geometry as well as of measuring solids; viz. by that premeditating order of the different dimensions given to its form, as to enable the vacuum for a reception of the determined quantity of two thousand baths of water allotted to it? Besides, the great knowledge of mechanism and the art of foundry, of casting such a colossal vessel, with its twelve supporters?²⁰

Having demonstrated the wisdom of Solomon in inventing such an elaborate irrigation system based on scientific principles, and having ably displayed his own fascination and competence in interpreting the biblical text, Bennett devotes the last page of his book to announce his forthcoming publication: *The Temple of Ezekiel!*

¹⁸ Bennett, *The Molten Sea*, 8.

¹⁹ Bennett, *The Molten Sea*, 11, 14.

²⁰ Bennett, *The Molten Sea*, 20.

