

give up on the world. This people Israel would be charged with a special mission as the deity works out his continuing agenda with mankind. By sharing his views with his Israelite contemporaries through the engaging medium of myth, the Yahwist must have given them cause to feel both humble and reverent—humble about the human condition and reverent as they approached the deity who had rallied them to his cause.

Each reader must form his own opinion about the Yahwist's message in Genesis 2–11. Is this a provocative mythology? Has it, even in our own time, the power to address the individual reader head-on? Or does this overrate the Yahwist's achievement? We can at least say that the Yahwist expresses the conviction that the origin and purpose of this world lie beyond the realm of known, tangible reality. His mythology declares that man is not the master of his own being and that a transcendent power sustains the world and guides its inhabitants. Because of their candor and immediacy, the Yahwist's reflections have fascinated men and women through the ages, and many have claimed that the mythology of the Yahwist has more relevance for our own time than does anything else that the Bible has to offer.

ASSESSING THE REIGN OF SOLOMON

Having given our attention to the Yahwist who may well have written during the Solomonic era, we now return to the monarch himself. If it was under David that Israel took her prominent place in the contemporary world, it was under Solomon that she continued to show obvious signs of strength. This king engaged in a host of enterprises that were possible, at least in part, because he did not have to spend his energy waging war. Edom and Damascus rebelled against Solomon, but did not trouble the Solomonic peace to any serious extent. Undoubtedly the king made an impact on the world of his day. In fact, tradition has it that when the queen of Sheba dropped in on him, she was momentarily overcome by the ostentatious splendor that engulfed her (1 Kings 10:5).

Solomon inherited much from Saul and David, and he worked hard to keep the machinery going. He seemed to know instinctively that his chief political task was to hold the Israelite state together, and for a time he managed that rather well. But as his building program progressed the Israelite populace, who had to bear the awful financial burden, grew more and more discontent. Though Israel's ancient tribal structure experienced a mortal blow as the result of extensive Solomonic reorganization, its spirit lived on in the many individuals who were not ready to relinquish past tradition.

In Solomon's concerted attempt to mold Israel into a typical Oriental state, he was divesting the nation of some things that loyal Yah-



The Israelite Temple at Arad. In the eastern Negev, 16 miles south of Hebron, lies the site of Arad. It consists of both a large Canaanite city of the Early Bronze Age and a more compact Israelite citadel founded in Solomonic times. Recent excavations in the citadel have brought to light a large royal sanctuary. Patterned after the Solomonic temple in Jerusalem, it was built in the tenth century B.C. and used for at least 200 years. The "Holy of Holies" is pictured above. Three steps lead from the main hall to its entrance, which is flanked by two nicely dressed stone incense altars. (Courtesy of the Consulate General of Israel, New York.)

wists regarded as distinctive and precious. This organization man turned monarch refused to acknowledge that the Mosaic covenant affirmed freedom and equality for all Israelites. The observation with which the Book of Judges concludes (21:25) must have been voiced frequently by those who reflected on a not too distant past: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes."

Solomon inspired a class consciousness and social inequality that must have displeased the Israelite masses. And his formality in public worship surely induced in many individuals a longing for the more spontaneous leadership of David.

Some Israelites did benefit from the gifts of this reputedly golden age. Indeed, the Yahwist recognized that he was living at an extremely important time in the nation's history. Israel had arrived. But what was to come next? In due course, Solomonic splendor appeared to be Solomonic oppression in disguise. While Solomon did not commit blunder after blunder, he might have done better.

THE DISRUPTION OF THE UNITED MONARCHY

When Solomon died in 922, the United Monarchy suffered an irreparable disruption. As the royal son and potential successor of Solomon, Rehoboam traveled to Shechem to secure formal confirmation as monarch from the elders of the northern tribes (1 Kings 12:1). The situation was now ripe for making demands. When the north was unsuccessful in getting its way with Rehoboam, it seceded.

There were several general causes of the schism. First was the fundamental difference between the north and south. The agrarian population of the north had little sympathy for the Bedouin population of the south. The northern tribes believed that they were the true Israel. They came to resent the increasing domination of Judah. They opposed any move that might legitimize dynastic rule. Indeed, Sheba's revolt (2 Sam. 20:1-2) indicates that the north might at any time withdraw its support of the Jerusalem-based royal establishment.

Second, the sweeping excesses of Solomon's government contributed greatly to the ensuing schism. Solomon's rule had been harsh. He had not pacified the northern tribes with sound public relations nor had he convinced them that the southern dynasty was legitimate. In particular, his building projects and day-to-day needs placed a heavy burden on the populace. It was obvious that costs were exceeding income. The grandiose buildings in Jerusalem were expensive to construct and maintain. And Solomon's lavish support of the Jerusalem Temple further drained the people.

The provincialism of the north may be mentioned as a third general cause of schism. In Shechem and Bethel, the north had its own revered shrines, and in Jacob it had its special patriarchal figure around whom it could focus its loyalties. Now the Solomonic temple had been constructed with the assistance of a vast resource of northern labor in a place that had no meaningful connection with the religious traditions of the northern tribes. Toward the end of Solomon's rule, the feelings of discontent must have been considerable.

More specific causes of the schism are enumerated in 1 Kings 12;