Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou has not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant.

I. Kings, 11, v. 11

Flawed prophet: a question of excess

The headquarters of the Zion Apostolic Faith Mission (ZAFM) are a large village called Maboloka, situated 28 kms north of the industrial town of Brits, in the North-West Province of South Africa. The village lies in the hot plains that stretch northwards from the long ridges of the Magaliesberg range to the west of Pretoria. Amongst the several thousand churches ‘of the spirit’ that may be identified in southern Africa today, the ZAFM has achieved, perhaps, a degree of obscurity that belies its prominent place in the history of the movement. Solomon Lion, its leader for nearly forty years from 1938 until 1987, was a man who left a decisive imprint—genetic, physical, personal—on the lives of very many people. He scattered his seed in startling profusion across the South African highveld. Mainly with a sjambok, it was alleged, he left his marks upon the bodies of numerous followers and their daughters. He was simultaneously revered as ‘god and martyr’ by large numbers of people who sought redemption outside the framework of immense constraint imposed on their lives by the apartheid regime.

After his death, his name and reputation evoke sharp reaction—much of it strongly respectful, some of it strongly disparaging—amongst his many surviving wives, his descendants and the members of his disparate congregations, and amongst outsiders who knew him. Part of
The Southern African highveld, 1980s, showing sites relevant to the life of Solomon Lion