

LUTHER'S WORKS

VOLUME 2

LECTURES ON GENESIS Chapters 6—14

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3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
1-800-325-3040 • cph.org

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this volume are translated from Luther's writings or from Luther's German Bible.

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General Introduction

THE first editions of Luther's collected works appeared in the sixteenth century, and so did the first efforts to make him "speak English." In America serious attempts in these directions were made for the first time in the nineteenth century. The Saint Louis edition of Luther was the first endeavor on American soil to publish a collected edition of his works, and the Henkel Press in Newmarket, Virginia, was the first to publish some of Luther's writings in an English translation. During the first decade of the twentieth century, J. N. Lenker produced translations of Luther's sermons and commentaries in thirteen volumes. A few years later the first of the six volumes in the Philadelphia (or Holman) edition of the *Works of Martin Luther* appeared. Miscellaneous other works were published at one time or another. But a growing recognition of the need for more of Luther's works in English has resulted in this American edition of Luther's works.

The edition is intended primarily for the reader whose knowledge of late medieval Latin and sixteenth-century German is too small to permit him to work with Luther in the original languages. Those who can, will continue to read Luther in his original words as these have been assembled in the monumental Weimar edition (*D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe; Weimar, 1883 ff.*). Its texts and helps have formed a basis for this edition, though in certain places we have felt constrained to depart from its readings and findings. We have tried throughout to translate Luther as he thought translating should be done. That is, we have striven for faithfulness on the basis of the best lexicographical materials available. But where literal accuracy and clarity have conflicted, it is clarity that we have preferred, so that sometimes paraphrase seemed more faithful than literal fidelity. We have proceeded in a similar way in the matter of Bible versions, translating Luther's translations. Where this could be done by the use of an existing English version — King James, Douay, or Revised Standard — we have done so. Where

it could not, we have supplied our own. To indicate this in each specific instance would have been pedantic; to adopt a uniform procedure would have been artificial – especially in view of Luther's own inconsistency in this regard. In each volume the translator will be responsible primarily for matters of text and language, while the responsibility of the editor will extend principally to the historical and theological matters reflected in the introductions and notes.

Although the edition as planned will include fifty-five volumes, Luther's writings are not being translated in their entirety. Nor should they be. As he was the first to insist, much of what he wrote and said was not that important. Thus the edition is a selection of works that have proved their importance for the faith, life, and history of the Christian Church. The first thirty volumes contain Luther's expositions of various Biblical books, while the remaining volumes include what are usually called his "Reformation writings" and other occasional pieces. The final volume of the set will be an index volume; in addition to an index of quotations, proper names, and topics, and a list of corrections and changes, it will contain a glossary of many of the technical terms that recur in Luther's works and that cannot be defined each time they appear. Obviously Luther cannot be forced into any neat set of rubrics. He can provide his reader with bits of autobiography or with political observations as he expounds a psalm, and he can speak tenderly about the meaning of the faith in the midst of polemics against his opponents. It is the hope of publishers, editors, and translators that through this edition the message of Luther's faith will speak more clearly to the modern church.

J. P.
H. L.

Introduction to Volume 2

IN the portion of his *Lectures on Genesis* presented in this volume (Weimar, XLII, 264–549; St. Louis, I, 436–921), Luther expounds the main body of the story of Noah, begun in Volume 1, and the accounts of the Flood and the Tower of Babel. He discusses also the first chapters in the story of Abraham, which will occupy all of Volume 3 of *Luther's Works* and part of Volume 4. The material set forth here, therefore, contains Luther's comments on the conclusion of the "general history" in Genesis and his description of the origins of the "special history," which begins with the call to Abraham. Thus the Book of Genesis is "the book of beginnings" in at least two senses for Luther: the beginnings of the history of the world, of the human race, its sin, God's promises, and His covenant with all humanity after the Flood; and the beginning of Israel, His chosen nation, the church, of His particular promises to it, and of His special covenant with it "in the loins of Abraham."

Luther's method of exposition remains that of the chapters translated in Volume 1. He bases his theological commentary on a grammatical and historical analysis of the Hebrew text and of translations. In these accounts of the eponymous ancestors of Israel such an analysis often consists of philological inquiry into the names of men and of places, together with a refutation of the fanciful and farfetched etymologies by which previous exegetes, both Jewish and Christian, have sought to explain these names. To amplify his knowledge of these etymologies and of other portions of the exegetical tradition as well, Luther depends on the works of Lyra and Burgensis (cf. *Luther's Works*, 1, Introduction, p. xi). Once more we have attempted to identify all the explicit and implicit references to Lyra, as well as to trace the many other references, citations, and allusions to Scripture, Christian writers, and classical authors in these *Lectures* — many of them not identified at all or erroneously labeled in other editions, including the Weimar edition. (In a few places, indeed, we have even had to question the reading of the transmitted text and to con-

jecture another reading in its place; cf. p. 336, note 19; p. 288, note 46.) Often this grammatical and historical analysis leads Luther into a polemical and homiletical excursus, suggested by certain parallels between the experience of the patriarchs and the situation of the church. Despite his continuing strictures on allegorical methods of Scriptural exposition, this volume of *Luther's Works*, like many of the other volumes of his exegetical works on the Old Testament, contains allegory as well.

This volume likewise contains further evidence of the editorial manipulation apparent in the earlier chapters of Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*. As the Introduction to Volume 1 has pointed out, present-day historical scholarship has raised serious doubts about the integrity of the materials collected in these *Lectures*, and with good reason. Our second volume contains the last part of the first volume in the original edition and the first part of the second (see p. 235). The editor, Veit Dietrich, is clearly responsible for the present state of the *Lectures*, even though Luther's name is attached to them. One should not be surprised, therefore, to discover Luther referring to events that had not yet happened when he was delivering these lectures in his classroom, but did happen between the time of the delivery of the lectures and the time of their appearance in print (e. g., p. 136). As in Volume 1, there are occasional asides to "the reader" (e. g., p. 259), a minor indication, but a significant one, that Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* are removed from the status of a verbatim transcript by at least two stages: students took down lecture notes, with a characteristic fluctuation in accuracy; editors compiled these notes, with a greater editorial liberty than current canons of scholarship would allow. In addition, there are passages here in Volume 2, as there are in Volume 1, where the very language and conceptual framework suggest the influence of Dietrich on the formulation of Luther's thoughts (e. g., p. 207 f., p. 242).

On the other hand, a careful study of this volume confirms the impression that the main body of this commentary on Noah and Abraham could have come from no one but Martin Luther. To mention only one example: when Noah's enemies taunt him for his opposition to the established church (see p. 50), or when the inner doubts in the heart of Abraham rise up to ask whether it is possible that he is the only one about whom God cares (see p. 293), this is Luther speaking out of his own fightings and fears as the Reformer and as the expositor of the Sacred Scriptures.

J. P.

LECTURES ON GENESIS

Chapters 6–14

Translated by
GEORGE V. SCHICK

CHAPTER SIX

IN the first five chapters Moses has described the human family as it was in the original world, and has set before our eyes the marvelous grandeur of the holy patriarchs who ruled the primitive world. In these five chapters, as in a first book, he sums up the story of the happiest portion of the entire human race and of the original world before the Flood. At this point we shall begin the second book of Genesis, which contains the story of the Flood and points out that all the descendants of Cain were destroyed, but that the family of the righteous endures through the ages. For when everything was perishing by the Flood, the family of the righteous was nevertheless preserved like an everlasting world.

But it is appalling for the entire human race to be destroyed down to eight souls, even though that age was truly a golden one. Later generations have never matched the excellence, the magnificence, and the splendor of the original world. And yet what God had created as most excellent and most outstanding among the human race He destroyed, for the sake of frightening us thoroughly, as it should be.

Nevertheless, even in this punishment God remained consistent. Whatever is most eminent God is wont to cast down and to humble. Peter, therefore, purposely declares (2 Peter 2:5) that God did not spare the first world. He wants to point out that in comparison with the succeeding world it was like a paradise. Similarly, God did not spare His most outstanding creation, the very angels, or the kings among His people, or the first-born of all times; but in the measure that men were endowed with greater gifts He also punished them the more severely when they began to misuse His gifts.

Thus in the second psalm the Spirit declares concerning kings (2:9): "Thou wilt rule them with an iron rod, and like a potter's vessel Thou wilt break them in pieces." Is He not Himself the Lord, who has established kings and wants everyone to honor and obey them? So He condemns and rejects the wisdom of the wise and the righteousness of the righteous (1 Cor. 1:19). It is the characteristic and continuing work of God that He condemns the most eminent,

casts down the most powerful, and shakes the most brave, even though they are His creatures. But He does this to frighten the ungodly and to awaken us with many awe-inspiring examples of His wrath, that we may learn to despair of ourselves and to put our trust in His grace alone.

Therefore either men must live under the shadow of God's wings and with trust in His mercy, or they must perish. But now, after the Fall, the situation among men has become such that the more numerous the gifts with which one is endowed, the greater one's pride is. This was the sin of the angels who fell. This was the sin of the first and original world, in which the most excellent part of the human race lived. But because they acted arrogantly as a result of their wisdom and other gifts, they perished. This was the sin of the greatest kings. This was the sin of almost all the first-born.¹ What need is there of many words? This is the original sin, that we have neither the knowledge nor the capability to use God's great and excellent gifts properly.

When men in very high positions disgrace themselves, not the gifts or the material goods but those who possess them are at fault. But God is the kind of dialectician who convicts by association² and destroys the possessor along with the material gift or possession.

It is profitable to observe and note such examples diligently. They are intended to frighten the proud and to humble us, that we may learn that our lives and all that we have depend on God's approval, who is disposed to give grace to the humble but to destroy the proud (1 Peter 5:5). But because the world neither understands nor does this, the kings, the mighty, and the righteous constantly fall, one after the other, until there are abundant examples everywhere of God's wrath and judgment. Thus also the Blessed Virgin sings (Luke 1:51): "He scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts; He puts down the mighty from their thrones; the rich He sends away empty."

All times, all courts, and all countries abound with such examples. And yet, thanks to the holy devil, the prince of the world, we have such hard hearts that we are not in the least affected by all this but boldly disregard it, even though we feel and see that we, too, must perish. Blessed, therefore, are those who take note of such things and,

¹ Cf. *Luther the Expositor*, pp. 97—98.

² Here Luther uses the technical term *arguere a coniugatis* from medieval logic and rhetoric.

CHAPTER NINE

1. *And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.*

THESE words were a truly necessary comfort after the entire human race had perished by the Flood and only eight souls were saved. Noah realized that God is indeed favorably inclined toward him; for He is not satisfied with that first blessing with which He blessed the human race at the creation of the world, but He adds this new one in order that Noah may have no doubt whatever concerning the future increase of his progeny. This promise was all the more welcome because God had previously given the express promise that He would never again rage against the human race with so severe a punishment.

For one thing, this chapter confirms marriage; for through His Word and command God joins the male with the female, and that for the definite purpose of filling the earth with human beings. Because before the Flood God had been provoked to wrath by the sin of lust, it was necessary, on account of this awful expression of wrath, to show now that God does not hate or condemn the lawful union of a man and a woman but wants the human race to be propagated by it.

This was a sure proof for Noah that God actually loves man, is well disposed toward him, and has now put away all wrath. He wants human beings to be propagated through the union of a man and a woman. He could have brought them into being from stones, as in the poet's fable about Deucalion,¹ if He had not approved of this lawful union. This passage, therefore, deals with the honorableness of marriage, which is the source of both the family and the state, and the nursery of the church.

At this point it is objected that this promise was pointless, because

¹ The myth of Deucalion, Pyrrha, and the Deluge was probably known to Luther in the version of Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book I, ll. 244—415; cf. p. 95, note 17.

Noah had already reached an age that was no longer suited for procreation; and indeed Scripture makes no mention of his having begotten any children later on. My answer is that this promise was made, not to Noah alone but also to his sons, likewise to the entire human race, and that the hope for descendants has reference to grandfather Noah as well.

This passage, moreover, leads us to believe that children are a gift of God and come solely through the blessing of God, just as Ps. 127:3 shows. The heathen, who have not been instructed by the Word of God, believe that the propagation of the human race happens partly by nature, partly by accident, especially since those who are regarded as most suited for procreation often fail to have children. Therefore the heathen do not thank God for this gift, nor do they receive their children as the gift of God.

2. The fear of you and dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered.

Here the dominion of man appears to be increased for the purpose of consoling him even more. Even though all the animals were put under the rule of man after the creatures had been called into being, we do not read that the beasts feared and shunned man to the same degree as Moses asserts in this passage. The reason is that until now the animals did not have to die in order to provide food for man, but man was a gentle master of the beasts rather than their slayer or consumer.

But here the animals are subjected to man as to a tyrant who has absolute power over life and death. Because a more oppressive form of bondage has now been imposed on them and a more extensive and oppressive dominion has been assigned to man, the animals are dominated by fear and dread of man. Thus we observe that even tame animals do not readily permit themselves to be handled. They feel the authority of man to be oppressive and naturally are influenced by their danger. This, I think was not the case before the Lord made this statement. Up to that time man had used animals solely for the tasks for which they were suited and for sacrifices, but not for food and nourishment.

By this increase of man's authority over that which the patriarchs

CHAPTER TEN

1. *These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; sons were born to them after the Flood.*

EVEN though this tenth chapter is seemingly barren and appears to serve no purpose, and though we, born after so many changes of kingdoms and peoples, have nothing to say about the individuals who are mentioned here, we should nevertheless not pass it over in silence.

In the first place in this chapter Moses divides the world after the Flood into three parts, corresponding to the three sons of Noah. Although our literature also divides the world into three parts — Asia, Europe, and Africa — Moses deviates from this division; for he includes in Europe also that part which we designate as Asia, together with the North, which extends as far as the Mediterranean Sea where it touches Palestine. That northern part, together with Europe, he assigns to the sons of Japheth, who, being more numerous, occupy a more extensive area.

The second part of the world he makes the one we call Africa, which also includes the Ethiopians and extends as far as the Strait of Gibraltar.

The third part he assigns to Shem, namely, Judea, but not it alone; for he adds Persia and other peoples, both eastern and southern.

THE GENERATION OF JAPHETH

2. *The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras.*

Japheth left seven sons. The names of all the others recur in Holy Scripture; only the name of Tiras perished and is not found anywhere else in Scripture.

Gomer is the first son, and Jerome thinks that he is the father of the Galatians.¹ But to me that group appears too small to fit this patriarch; besides, it is certain that the Galatians are Germans, for it

¹ Jerome, *Liber hebraicarum quaestionum in Genesim, Patrologia, Series Latina*, XXIII, 999.

is maintained that even today they use the German language, that is, the idiom of the Saxons.²

From Ezekiel (38:6) it is certain that they are northern peoples. I am of the opinion that they are those nations which dwell near the Cimmerian Bosphorus, for the close relationship of the names is an important piece of evidence.³ Although the peoples who today inhabit those places are immigrants and not autochthonous, that is, indigenous, this is still no reason to be in doubt about the place. The interchange of the letters *g* and *s* or *c* is common, as the pronunciation of the Italians and of the Belgians proves. I think that Gomer with his descendants inhabited the Cimmerian Bosphorus, Maeotis,⁴ and the neighboring region toward the north.

Who Magog is I regard as certain. Ezekiel mentions Gog and Magog (38:2). The meaning of גֹּמֶג is "roof." Therefore Gog is considered to be the Scythians, who do not live in houses, as we do, but only in huts or tents.

Similarly, the Turks, too, boast that they do not build magnificent structures, as do we, who adorn our cities with magnificent buildings and erect castles as though we were going to live forever. The Turks laugh at this ambitious endeavor of ours, and they regard it as a part of saintliness not to dwell in stately houses. Hence they lay waste vineyards and demolish stately buildings.⁵ The northern peoples whom we call Tartars follow a similar way of life; for they also dwell in huts, or, as the Hebrews say, are גֹּמֶג, like the Scythians and other nations.

The Madai are familiar. As their name proves, there is no doubt that they are the Medes. More certain evidence is derived from sacred history, which calls Darius a Mede. Moreover, secular history also declares him to have been a Mede.⁶

Javan is undoubtedly Janus, from which the place Janiculum received its name.⁷ Even though it seems to some that the Ionians

² It is not clear just where Luther got this startling notion.

³ This is still the interpretation of many scholars on the location of Gomer.

⁴ *Palus Maeotis* was the ancient name for the Sea of Azov; it appears, for example, on the map of Ptolemy (cf. p. 108, note 9).

⁵ Cf. p. 181, note 68.

⁶ Luther is thinking of the Book of Ezra and probably of Herodotus.

⁷ The Janiculum is on the west bank of the Tiber; by his reference to Greek Luther may mean the Etruscans, but more probably he means the area known as *Magna Graecia*.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. *And so Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb.*

AT the beginning of this chapter the geography causes some confusion. Abram is in Egypt, and he is returning to the land of Canaan. Therefore the question is asked how it may be said that he set out toward the south,¹ when Canaan is located toward the north. But the answer is easy: Moses is not speaking of the journey; he is speaking of Abraham's abode, namely, that when he returned from Egypt, he stopped in the southern part of the land of Canaan and carefully avoided the places that were rather close to the land from which he had gone out. Consequently, this little section, too, serves as an example of his patience and endurance, or rather of his utterly confident faith in the promise. For the holy man remained unwearied by so many migrations and clung with a firm faith to the promise concerning his descendants, who would possess the land of Canaan.

2. *Now Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.*

Strictly speaking the word **רֶבֶּז** does not mean rich; it means heavy and weighed down with burdens. Moses mentions three kinds of wealth: cattle, silver, and gold. The word **מִקְנֵה** is derived from the verb **קָנָה**, which means to acquire, to purchase, to possess. But **מִקְנֵה** is commonly used for cattle, as below in chapter 46:32, where Joseph instructs his brothers and his father that when the king would inquire about their occupation, they should answer that they were men of **מִקְנֵה**, cattle. And in Ex. 12:38 occurs: "Sheep, oxen, and small cattle."

Jerome translates this word with "animals of various kinds"² and thus makes it a generic term including the smaller quadrupeds, which the Latins usually call a flock.

Here, too, Abraham's great faith is praised. Although he was weighed down with a large number of domestics and had with him

¹ Where we have "the Negeb," Luther has "the south."

² The Vulgate reads: *Erat autem dives valde in possessione auri et argenti.*

[W, XLII, 494]

flocks and cattle, he was nevertheless able to bear so many migrations. No doubt the gold and silver were gifts of the king, with which God, in His marvelous counsel, alleviated his long exile.

Here Moses mentions for the first time that Abraham was very rich and well supplied with gold and silver. This is comforting to exiles and strangers. For sometimes God is wont to pursue such a course and even in the midst of misfortunes to enrich His own with temporal goods.

If there were perpetual struggles and perplexities when trials come, and no intervals of comfort, faith would be shaken. For this reason God sometimes allows us a breathing spell and assuages cares and misery with some comfort, just as we use a potion or spices to revive those who are exhausted by trouble or grief and to keep them from dying.

We should keep this example in mind in our perils, that we may bear patiently the adversities facing us and wait for comfort in faith. God is faithful, and with the trial He provides also an escape (1 Cor. 10:13). Of course, the real deliverance takes place only when we are rid of this flesh and leave this life.

But prior to this perfect deliverance He often comforts our troubled hearts, granting also earthly advantages, which prove both that God does not forget His own and that the rewards of godliness are sure. Just as it was a great trial that Sarah was taken away from Abram by this powerful king, so it is also an extraordinary comfort that nothing untoward happens to Sarah and that Pharaoh sends Abraham away with rich presents and wealth.

The philosophers and the monks have often found fault with this passage and have wondered why the Holy Spirit records that Abraham was rich or greatly encumbered with the possession of cattle, silver, and gold. Both arrive at the opinion that so holy a man should not have had any wealth but should have lived in poverty, as befits someone who has put all his hope in the mercy of the one and only God, especially since he was an exile.

But let us remember that these things were written, not for the sake of Abraham but, as Paul says in Rom. 15:4 and in 2 Tim. 3:16, for our instruction, reproof, and comfort; for the Holy Spirit saw the monstrous thoughts of men about godliness, thoughts which were not only brought into the church in our age by the monks and the Anabaptists but have been there in every age.

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