

LUTHER'S WORKS

VOLUME 4

LECTURES ON GENESIS

Chapters 21—25

JAROSLAV PELIKAN

Editor

WALTER A. HANSEN

Associate Editor



Copyright © 1964 Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
1-800-325-3040 • cph.org

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Concordia Publishing House.

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

Contents

<i>General Introduction</i>	vii
<i>Introduction to Volume 4</i>	ix
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE	3
CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO	91
CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE	187
CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR	218
CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE	300
<i>Indexes</i>	411

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 4

WITH the lectures in this volume (Weimar, XLIII, 137–430; St. Louis, I, 1368–1765) Luther brought to a close his exposition of the life of Abraham. For sheer length as well as theological scope, this was the most extensive “biography” he ever produced. Beginning midway in Volume 2 (pp. 236 ff.) and continuing through all of Volume 3 of *Luther’s Works*, the biography of Abraham has come to a conclusion here in Volume 4, and “we have buried the saintly patriarch Abraham” (p. 318). There follow the opening chapters of the succeeding patriarchal narratives, which will conclude with the life of Joseph, at the end of the Book of Genesis and the end of Luther’s *Lectures on Genesis* in Volume 8 of *Luther’s Works*.

Once again the lectures on chapters 21–25 leave us largely uninformed about their chronology and the circumstances under which they were delivered. In the Introduction to Volume 3 we surmised that Luther was lecturing on chapter 19 of Genesis about March or April 1539. For the lectures in the present volume we have two dates that are more definite – only two dates, but both extremely helpful. During the autumn of 1539 Wittenberg suffered one of its periodic visitations of plague. One of the victims was Luther’s friend and colleague on the university faculty, Dr. Sebald Münsterer, who was buried on October 26, 1539. From a marginal note, whose authenticity we have no reason to question, we learn that Luther began his lectures on chapter 22 of Genesis on the day after Münsterer’s burial. He counseled those who feared the plague to take flight without feeling guilty or ashamed; for himself, however, he believed that the greatest menace was fear itself, and he chose to go on with his lectures. Thus the exposition of chapters 20 and 21 probably fell into the six months between April and October 1539.

There is one other reference in this commentary that provides information about the progress of Luther’s lectures: Luther’s statement (p. 266) that Philip Melanchthon had taken seriously ill while in Weimar and that Luther and his colleagues were praying for his

recovery for the sake of the work of the church and of the university. From a letter addressed to Luther by Melancthon on June 14, 1540, and from Luther's reply of June 18, we may conclude that Luther's statement, spoken in connection with his exposition of Gen. 24:15, came at about this time. It would seem to follow from this that chapters 22 and 23 of Genesis had been the subject of Luther's lectures during the last two months of 1539 and the first four or five months of 1540, and that he began lecturing on chapter 24 perhaps in May of the latter year. A few pages later, in his comments on Gen. 24:29 (p. 281) Luther refers to outbreaks of arson; as our note on this passage indicates, we have succeeded in finding parallel references to arson in two letters written by Luther on June 12, 1541, and on July 8, 1541. But this parallel, while illuminating and rather intriguing, is certainly not sufficient evidence to warrant any hypothesis that it took Luther an entire year to move from Gen. 24:15 to Gen. 24:29, a total of only 15 pages in our edition.

In this volume, as in all of its predecessors, we have based our translation on the Weimar edition of Luther's works. But we have had even more occasion than before to discover a large number of typographical errors in the Weimar text. So many are there, in fact, that we have not called attention to each of them in a separate footnote but have documented our corrections or emendations only where the errors were egregious or where they have actually confused two Latin words. Similarly, we have not annotated our corrections of the identification of references, chiefly Biblical references, in marginal notes or footnotes by the Weimar editors. On the other hand, where the original text itself contains a faulty citation (e. g., p. 281, note 55), we have corrected it in our translation and explained the correction in a footnote. The one exception to this latter procedure has been the numbering in the Book of Psalms. As we have mentioned in other volumes (cf. *Luther's Works*, 13, pp. ix-x), Luther often followed the numbering of the psalms in the Vulgate even late in his life. Apparently unaware of this, the Weimar editors of the *Lectures on Genesis* have inserted an exclamation point in brackets where Luther numbered a psalm according to the Vulgate; we have not followed the Weimar edition in this gratuitous editorial practice, nor have we made specific references to our adaptation of Luther's numbering to that of the Hebrew Bible and the Authorized Version.

As has been the case in previous volumes, the editing of the English translation of Luther has provided an opportunity for trac-

ing many quotations and allusions that have remained unidentified in all previous editions. For example, Luther refers explicitly to Josephus and Pliny in his discussion of "red earth"; but as far as we can tell, no edition of Luther has identified the references before (p. 331, note 30). We have also tried to locate the sources of Luther's references to the Christian and Jewish exegetical traditions. Most of his information about the latter came from Lyra, whose commentary we have continued to consult throughout. But we have discovered that at least one datum was supplied to Luther by the pioneering work of Johannes Reuchlin (cf. p. 393, note 79) rather than by Nicholas of Lyra (cf. also *Luther's Works*, 14, p. 335, note 54). Most of the other Biblical, classical, patristic, and medieval quotations and allusions have been duly noted; but our researches have also led once more to occasional and total frustration (e. g., p. 219, note 2). Finally, we have also adverted once or twice to the editorial problem that affects all of Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*, the question of authenticity and reliability (cf. *Luther's Works*, 1, pp. x-xii), and we have found reason to change neither our conclusion that Luther's editors have taken liberties with individual passages of his work nor our conviction that the result of their editing as a whole is nevertheless fundamentally reliable.

J. P.

LECTURES ON GENESIS

Chapters 21–25

Translated by
GEORGE V. SCHICK

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

I HAVE often cautioned against disregarding the chronology in the sacred accounts. We must keep in mind which patriarchs lived at the same time, for in this way extraordinary light is thrown on the history. Thus Abraham saw all the men mentioned in the genealogy that is recorded in Gen. 11. He was a contemporary of Noah for 58 years and of Shem for 31. Moreover, Arphaxad was a contemporary of Abraham for 84 years. Shelah lived three years after Abraham, and Eber 64 years. Peleg was a contemporary of Abraham for 48 years; Reu, for 78 years; Serug, for 101; Nahor, for 49; Terah, for 135. Was this not a most glorious age? During this time the Word was spread abroad by so many teachers of whom some, like Shem, saw the first world, that is, the fathers before the Flood, like Methuselah, who saw Adam, the first human being. And yet Satan prevailed among the children of iniquity. Therefore Sodom was destroyed, and the kingdoms of the world were troubled in various ways by wars. Yes, even Abraham himself was led astray by the showy religion of the Chaldeans; but he was called back by Shem and the other fathers.¹ It was Noah's son Ham who brought this bane into the world. Accordingly, Japheth, too, degenerated, and the Messianic line remained in the house of Shem alone, by whom the promise was passed on to Abraham. Thus the chronology throws light on the account if one takes into consideration the entire character of the times.

1. *The Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as He had promised.*
2. *And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.*
3. *Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.*

¹ On the basis of Joshua 24:2 Luther concluded that Abraham had been an idolater before his call; cf. *Luther's Works*, 2, pp. 239—240.

Moses is very wordy in this passage. He repeats nearly all statements twice. Evidently it is his purpose to commend to us that most exuberant joy of the saintly patriarch. After awful misfortunes Abraham has not only found a safe place and a favorably disposed king, but Sarah becomes pregnant and bears him the son who is the heir of the promise. But if the joy of parents is genuine when children are born to them in the usual manner without a promise, how much more Abraham rejoiced over this his son for whom he had now waited so many years after he had been promised! Accordingly, what thus far has been an object of hope, and what he has believed, this is now a reality; and, if I may express it in this way, the promise has now been made flesh.

We cannot come close to feeling this joy; for the things which thus far had been invisible and impossible, which Abraham had believed, are now visible and altogether possible — an example for us, that we may learn that there is no real joy in this world except that which the Word brings when it is believed.

When Moses mentions the definite and established time, this has the purpose of emphasizing the promise and of making us pay greater attention to the Word of creation than to the work itself. Thus Isaac was born on approximately the same day on which Sodom was destroyed a year earlier, evidently in order that the godly parents might have a joy to counterbalance the vastness of their grief. For God does both: He brings down to hell, and He brings back; He afflicts, and He makes glad.

Therefore the fact that Moses frequently brings God's Word or promise into this account does not imply that our ordinary way of giving birth takes place without the Word. For when God once said (Gen. 1:28): "Be fruitful," that Word is effective to this day and preserves nature in a miraculous way. But how few there are who believe this or are aware of it!

Hence just as Augustine says about the five loaves that He who fed the five thousand people feeds the entire world to this day by the same miracle,² so we can correctly state about the birth of a human being that it is just as miraculous today as was the birth of Isaac.

But because of their frequent occurrence these great miracles

² Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium Tractatus*, Tr. XXIV, 1, *Patrologia, Series Latina*, XXXV, 1593.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

1. *Sarah lived a hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah.*
2. *And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.*

IN the first place, in order not to appear unacquainted with or not to have read the thoughts of the Jews, we shall review them briefly.¹ For they invent hidden meanings in this passage for the years of Sarah's age, because Moses does not simply state that Sarah lived 127 years, as we usually say, but adds the word "years" to each number: 100 years, 20 years, seven years. They maintain that this is done to indicate that Sarah was as beautiful in her hundredth year as she was in her twentieth, and that she was no less chaste and virtuous in her twentieth year than she had been in her seventh year.

Let us by all means grant them these figments, which were invented with a pious sentiment to bestow praise on the extraordinary virtue and the noble figure of an extraordinarily saintly matriarch who very much deserved such praise. We, too, are in the habit of doing this after the death of friends and relatives. We recount their commendable deeds and virtues, cover up their faults, and mention things that deserve praise. We do so in order to alleviate our grief and longing in this manner.

But it would be silly if one wanted to make from this a general rule or canon and apply it to all numbers of years. Thus when the years of the patriarchs are enumerated above, it would be altogether absurd if a similar comparison of the years of their life were undertaken in the case of each one.

I am surprised, however, that they did not rather consider why Moses uses the plural — "the lives of Sarah" — as though he intended

¹ The source of this information about the Jewish exegetical tradition is Lyra *ad* Gen. 23:1.

to say: "Sarah had lives." A consideration of the years of the lives of Sarah would be more profitable.

For Moses is referring to the great and infinite variety of changes, misfortunes, and perils, as well as to the very widely different kinds of life that Sarah saw and bore. She was born in Babylon, and there she married. Soon after this she left with her husband and lived in Haran. Later on she dwelt in the land of Canaan. There Abraham was a sojourner. Finally he came to Egypt and Gerar. These most annoying changes and migrations the very saintly mother endured with great courage, and in regard to every outcome of all her misfortunes she was most patient.

And human life as a whole is actually such that because of the extraordinary change of all things one can call it "lives"; for we die as often as a new trial arises, and we become alive in turn when we are buoyed up and receive comfort.

Observe, I beg you, how great a variety and difference there is in the life of each person.² The first age is that of a seven-year-old boy. When this has come to an end, another period of seven years follows, just as philosophers and physicians, too, point out when they discuss the climacteric years during which striking changes take place. And Paul says about himself in 1 Cor. 13:11:³ "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways." Such changes are part of the lives of the human race. For this reason that entire sequence of ages in each human being is justly called lives, because during any period of seven years we are changed into a different appearance, disposition, and understanding. In short, we die and become alive.

During the third period of seven years thoughts about marriage arise. When you have become a husband, the cares of the household or of the state follow. When you are elected to the senate, you are admitted to the deliberations and counsels of the rulers. There you must put on new manners and a new skin; for many inconveniences, burdens, and difficulties, as well as the hatred of neighbors and associates, will have to be borne. Often there will even be a lessening of prestige and esteem. This variety of new ways and of changes makes for a variety of lives.

² Luther may have derived this information about "the ages of man" from Aristotle, *History of Animals*, Book VII, ch. 1, and from Horace, *Ars poetica*, lines 158 ff.

³ Here the original has "2 Cor."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

1. *Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things.*
2. *And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had: Put your hand under my thigh,*
3. *and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell,*
4. *but will go to my country and my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.*

So far Moses has brought the account of Abraham's life up to that act which is customarily the last one in life, namely, his testament, which Abraham is now about to make. And the only care with which the father still concerns himself has to do with the marriage of his son and with the promised progeny. Consequently, this entire chapter pertains to Isaac, whose marriage is described.

Moreover, it is the first passage — and one that is completely clear — concerning the duty of parents toward their children and, on the other hand, concerning the proper and respectful attitude of parents toward their children when a marriage is contracted. As common as this discussion is at present, so very vexatious it is, since those mutual duties, imposed by divine and human right, have almost been done away with because of the depravity of men. Therefore when we attempt to restore them and to convince men by teaching that a betrothal entered into without the consent and will of parents can neither be lawful nor regarded as valid,¹ we incur the hatred and calumny of many.

The canonists of the pope oppose us very sharply. The professors of civil law are in complete agreement with them, and we surely have

¹ See also p. 72, note 63.

[W, XLIII, 292, 293]

them as our implacable and mortal enemies in the whole world. Therefore even though these efforts are thankless, yet the defense and confession of the truth must not for this reason be given up or thrust aside. For in this passage we have a clear example of our conviction, even though no law is being established. For elsewhere, of course, there is no lack of the authority of laws, not only of those that are divine but also of those that are drawn by sound inference from the fountainhead of natural right, as laws and civil rights are. On our side are the examples of Scripture, the written laws and the rights. Why, then, do the jurists and pettifoggers inveigh against us?

Accordingly, let us fortify ourselves with Holy Scripture against their stubborn spite. It is their habit to boast before their hearers that they cannot depart from their canons and pronounce a decision on the basis of our writings, which they contemptuously and shamefully call canonical,² as though we actually were inventing or sanctioning something new and out of our own heads. We have God's will, natural reason, the examples of the fathers, and civil law in our favor.

And they themselves know this, but they do not want to be admonished and rebuked. Yet it must not be tolerated that they corrupt and infect the hearts of young people with their outrageous opinions. We shall never tolerate it that their wicked, execrable, and vicious canons, which contradict the Word of God, prescribe anything to us; and on this account I am giving this warning, so that the godly may fortify themselves against their calumnies and blasphemies.

What a wickedness it is to know the truth and yet to say: "In my book I find it written differently; therefore a different decision must be made, without regard for laws, civil right, and the Word of God, which decree the opposite"! Should one delude and turn up one's nose³ at people in such a way that they are forced to regard as settled whatever wicked pronouncements the canonists make in accordance with their canons?

² The word in the original is *Catonichen*, whose meaning remains a puzzle. It could perhaps be a reference to Cato (to whom the *Disticha Catonis* were attributed); but even if it is, the ending *chen* is a problem. Is it the German diminutive suffix, a copyist's error for the German adjectival suffix *schen*, or the Greek adjectival suffix *χην*? Because of the phrase *a canonibus recedere* earlier in the sentence, we have read *Canonischen*.

³ An allusion to Horace, *Satires*, VI, 5, 6.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

1. *Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah.*
2. *She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.*
3. *Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, Leummim.*
4. *The sons of Midian were Ephah, Ephher, Hanoah, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah.*

LET us bury the most saintly patriarch Abraham, whose example very much deserves to be preserved forever in the church of God. But this chapter presents a matter and a seemingly very bad example that gravely offends everybody. For Abraham, an old man, decrepit, near the grave, and altogether moribund, before whose eyes and mind there can be nothing more than death, marries a young girl and begets more children.

In the previous chapter Abraham concluded his span of life, drew up his testament, and made Isaac the heir of all his goods. Now however, after his son's wedding, he himself also takes a wife. It is not sufficiently evident what one's reaction should be, and I am altogether uncertain whether there is a *hysteron proteron* or, on the other hand, a *proteron hysteron*.¹ But if we follow the order of the text, a strange question arises. Paul himself explains in Rom. 4:19 that "Abraham's body was as good as dead and unfit to procreate, because he was now 100 years old." Hence it seems somehow that this part of the chapter should have been inserted earlier and that Abraham married the girl Keturah before he begot Isaac. Perhaps it would be possible to answer that pressing question in this manner. But I am not making a positive statement.

For even though we assume that Abraham married Keturah after he had driven out Hagar, yet at that time he was not far from 100

¹ In his *Computation of the Years of the World* (W, LIII, 69) Luther considered the possibility that many of the accounts in the Pentateuch had been written *per hysteron proteron*, but he was inclined to reject it.

INDEX TO SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Genesis

1:3 — 155
 1:9 — 5
 1:27 — 8
 1:28 — 4, 8, 52, 89,
 303, 337
 1:29-30 — 276
 1:31 — 290
 2:5 — 299
 2:18 — 6, 8
 2:21 — 263
 2:23-24 — 362
 3:7 — 257
 3:9 — 61
 3:15 — 95, 97, 175,
 242, 311
 3:19 — 97
 4:1 — 374
 4:19 — 306
 5:24 — 310
 6:10 — 214
 7:21 — 317
 10:21 — 385
 11 — 3, 184
 11:29 — 185
 11:31 — 250
 12 — 152
 12:1 — 350
 12:2-3 — 172
 12:3 — 152, 154
 13:15 — 246
 13:16 — 172
 14 — 214
 14:14 — 109
 14:19 — 151
 15 — 113, 134
 15:2 — 108
 15:5 — 152
 15:6 — 168
 15:15 — 308, 310
 15:16 — 246
 16 — 109
 16:2 — 20, 353, 354
 16:3 — 306, 337
 16:10 — 155, 388
 16:12 — 71, 328, 332
 16:13 — 324
 17:4 — 303
 17:20 — 20, 35, 155,
 326
 18:1 — 192, 278

18:8 — 37
 18:12 — 210
 18:18 — 154
 18:23-33 — 37
 19 — 272
 19:1 — 278
 19:2-3 — 281
 19:9 — 215
 19:24 — 274
 19:27 — 196
 20:16 — 265
 21:7 — 13
 21:9 — 403
 21:11 ff. — 325
 21:12 — 92, 129, 350
 21:15 — 299
 21:15-16 — 43
 21:20 — 387
 21:25 ff. — 74
 21:27 — 90
 22 — 98, 359
 22:1-2 — 97
 22:2 — 99
 22:2 ff. — 274
 22:3 — 108
 22:14 — 138
 22:16 — 232
 22:18 — 154, 156,
 311, 387
 23 — 395
 23:1 — 187
 23:4 — 205
 24:2, 3 — 230
 24:10 — 260
 24:14 — 265
 24:18 — 297
 24:28 — 297
 25:1-2 — 301, 302
 25:8 — 329
 25:9 — 327
 25:12-16 — 327
 25:18 — 331
 25:21 — 341
 25:22 — 139
 25:23 — 24, 350
 25:25 — 394
 25:27 — 383
 25:31-34 — 395
 25:34 — 393
 26:8 — 10
 27:40 — 365

28:17 — 139
 28:18 — 178
 30:3 — 354
 31:42 — 134
 32:26 ff. — 322
 33:5 — 228
 34 — 252
 34:25 — 14
 35:16-19 — 189
 36 — 365
 37:34-35 — 195
 37:35 — 350
 46:26 — 230
 48:9 — 155
 49:33 — 317

Exodus

14:15 — 322
 20:3-4 — 135
 20:7 — 245, 336, 361
 20:12 — 72, 293
 22:16-17 — 227
 23:8 — 85
 25:40 — 176
 28:30 — 143
 32:2 ff. — 275
 32:6 — 10, 15
 33:20 — 66
 33:23 — 371

Leviticus

7:28-36 — 183
 12:2-8 — 98
 17:7 — 394
 18:3 — 14
 27:9 — 200

Numbers

10:12 — 71
 13:3 — 71
 13:26 — 71
 13:33 — 332
 21:5 — 214
 23 — 185
 23:7 — 186
 23:19 — 127

Deuteronomy

4:7 — 66
 4:24 — 66