

# LUTHER'S WORKS

VOLUME 5

LECTURES ON GENESIS

Chapters 26—30

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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*

**T**he 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 5*

**M**OST of the lectures presented in this volume (Weimar, XLIII, 431–695; St. Louis, II, 122–609) are devoted to Luther's exposition of what he calls "the fourth book of Genesis" (cf. p. 200, note 11), covering the accounts of the latter part of the life of Isaac and the life of Jacob until just before his separation from Laban. It includes the birth of 11 of the 12 eponymous patriarchs of the tribes of Israel—of course, with the exception of Benjamin (cf. Gen. 35:16-20).

The chronological data about the actual lectures themselves are sparse and difficult to harmonize. Some of them come from the printed version of the lectures, some from the work of various scholars, notably Peter Meinhold. In part they are contained in external sources; in part they have been ferreted out of the text itself by our investigations. Arranged in the order of the chapters on which the lectures are based, these data present the following information:

**26:1:** On December 10, 1541, Jerome Besold wrote to Veit Dietrich (then in Nürnberg): "By the kindness of God, Doctor Martin is continuing with the exposition of Genesis, and a few days ago he began to expound chapter 26." Peter Meinhold suggests that December 5, 1541, a Monday, be taken as the day when Luther resumed his lectures, following an absence from the classroom that lasted a year or so.

**26:9:** Student notes indicate that Luther was lecturing on Gen. 26:9 on February 18, 1542. This was a Saturday, but it has been conjectured that he was making up for lectures he had missed, perhaps during his travels of the preceding month with Melancthon.

**26:24 and 30:30:** Twice in these lectures Luther is represented as describing himself as "60 years old." The first such reference occurs in the context of some reflection about the mystery of human consciousness (p. 75). The other appears in the course

of a discussion about many people whom Luther had known who had resembled the greedy Laban (p. 370). If both of these references were to be taken literally, this would mean that Luther traversed the ground from the end of Gen. 26 to the end of Gen. 30 between November 10, 1543, and November 9, 1544. Even apart from the other evidence, however, it should be pointed out that Luther often used round numbers when citing dates, even the dates of his own life; moreover, certain evidence suggests some confusion both in his own mind and in that of his relatives about the exact date of his birth.

27:11-22: In the eighth of his sermons, delivered from 1562 to 1565, on the life of Luther, John Mathesius reports: "When the Doctor was lecturing on Rebecca, Gen. 27, during the year [15]41 . . . I heard these words from him." It is evident from other sources that Mathesius was in Wittenberg until about April 12, 1542. Therefore Meinhold has proposed, quite plausibly, that the reference to "[15]41" be corrected to "1542" to bring it into harmony with the other information we have about the chronological sequence of Luther's lectures.

28: On June 29, 1542, John Forster wrote to John Schradin to inform him that Luther was still lecturing on the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis.

28:20-22: In his exposition of this passage (p. 260), Luther speaks of Henry, who had become Duke of Saxony after the death of his brother, Duke George. Now Duke George had died on April 17, 1539. During 1541, Henry, who was feeling his advanced age, had turned over many of his administrative duties to his son, Maurice. Later in that year, on August 18, 1541, Henry had died, leaving the title to Maurice. When he succeeded to that title, Maurice was still a partisan of the Reformation and continued to be one during the time that these lectures were being delivered. Eventually, however, he switched sides and earned from the Lutherans the title "the Judas of Meissen"; this he had done by the time these lectures were edited for publication. Yet there is no reference at all to Maurice in the comment on p. 260; nor is Duke Henry spoken of as having died or as "of blessed memory," as Luther referred to him in an undated letter to Maurice, presumably written late in 1541 or early in 1542. Were it not for all the other evidence just cited, this internal testimony would suggest that Duke Henry was still living when this was spoken and there-

fore that Luther was lecturing on Gen. 28:20–22 sometime before August 18, 1541.

30:30: In connection with comments on the “sack of Rome,” which took place on May 6, 1527, the lectures refer to the compact drawn up at Wurzen (p. 369). One of the parties to it was Maurice of Saxony. Luther was engaged in correspondence about Wurzen during April 1542. (The proximity of this reference on p. 369 to the second of the allusions to Luther’s being “60 years old” must qualify any conclusions drawn from that allusion.) The comments on Wurzen here in the lectures suggest that Luther spoke these words a good while after the event.

As the introduction to Volume 6 will point out, there is at least some reason to believe that the materials on Gen. 31–37 contained there fall into the period from the latter part of 1542, through most or all of 1543, and perhaps even into sometime in 1544. The introduction to Volume 7 suggests that most of the lectures on Gen. 38–44 presented there were delivered during 1544, with some possibility that the earliest ones come from 1543. Greater precision of dating than this seems unattainable.

Collating these data, some of which cannot be harmonized with the rest, we would conclude that Luther seems to have lectured on Gen. 26–30 from the end of 1541 until the summer or early autumn of 1542. Nevertheless, some of the information does indeed seem difficult to square with such a conclusion, and we are compelled to take the text prepared by Luther’s editors as it stands, without being able to determine either the precise date or the precise form of the actual lectures as Luther delivered them.

So far as the form of the lectures is concerned, that text manifests, in this volume as in the other seven volumes of the *Lectures on Genesis*, repeated evidence of editorial liberties which Luther’s students took far beyond anything permitted by modern literary convention. Luther’s quotations from the Latin and even from the Greek classics are extensive and almost always letter-perfect; his memory was, to be sure, phenomenal, but it was not infallible. The occasional outbursts of colloquial German are indeed sufficient to season the lecture, but they are much less frequent than they are in verbatim transcripts of other lectures. Various statements purportedly delivered in a classroom lecture are nevertheless (cf. p. 271, note 6) addressed to “the reader.” Theological comments



on various issues, including original sin (cf. p. 49) and the immortality of the soul (cf. p. 73), are cast in a form that arouses the suspicion of editorial manipulation and censorship. These and similar touches appear in the present volume too, alongside expositions which, both in form and in content, are so obviously Luther's own that we must accept them at face value, even though much of the text cannot be regarded as a presentation of Luther's *ipsissima verba*.

We have once more followed the practice of calling attention only to those typographical errors in the Weimar text which, if permitted to stand, would yield another Latin word; other errors we have simply corrected without comment. In most instances such corrections were justified by the text of earlier editions. Therefore unless the Weimar editors had access to manuscript evidence for the text beyond what they have listed, these divergences of the Weimar text from earlier editions must be taken as errors. In a few instances we have, either with or without the lead of the Weimar editors, adopted conjectural emendations that seem to be demanded by the context (e. g., p. 91, note 73; p. 100, note 2; p. 158, note 52; p. 178, note 64).

(During the translation of this volume Dr. George V. Schick died, having brought his work to nearly the end of chapter 27 [cf. p. 182]. Thus more than half of the American edition of these *Lectures on Genesis* stands as a monument to this learned Hebraist and classicist.)

J. P.

# LECTURES ON GENESIS

Chapters 26–30

*Translated by*  
**GEORGE V. SCHICK and PAUL D. PAHL**  
*Revised by the Editors*

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

1. *Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech, king of the Philistines.*

IT has often been stated that in this entire book the accounts of the fathers are described in a very ordinary covering, as it were, and are presented without any splendor or display of their religion, righteousness, and wisdom, yes, in accordance with the most inglorious aspect of their household management and their physical life. For what else does Moses relate about Isaac than that he was born to his father Abraham, begot children, tended cattle, and wandered about in various regions? Little or nothing is taught there about prayer and about the monstrous religious practices of the monks. But what is it to me that he was a husband and that he slept with his wife? Are these things to be taught in the church? For this is how the flesh clings to that external and very ordinary aspect when it looks at the life of the fathers and sees nothing that edifies but is only displeased. Later, however, it thinks about becoming acquainted with the life of St. Bernard, St. Antony, and men like them, where there are amazing and unbelievable works in the matter of abstinence, fastings, and vigils, and where there is no familiarity with women and servants, much less with cattle. It laughs at these ordinary and inglorious works in the household of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob and devotes its attention to those that are splendid and magnificent. Or if these accounts are read at times in the churches, no one admires them; for no one observes the true worth and the true ornaments of these accounts.

Accordingly, we teach—and this should be diligently and frequently impressed—that in the examples of the saintly fathers it should be looked upon as the main thing and the highest commendation that God spoke with them and that they had the Word of God. This is the point that elucidates these accounts and gives a

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

1. *Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east.*
2. *As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and lo, three flocks of sheep lying beside it; for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large,*
3. *and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well, and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place upon the mouth of the well.*

**S**O far Moses has conducted the very saintly patriarch through those more sublime and truly ecclesiastical exercises of faith and the Word of God, and this topic is most noteworthy in all the histories of the saints, namely, when they hear the Word of God, believe it, and are exercised in faith by many tribulations and annoyances. For although they are weak in faith here, yet they are plainly divine and heavenly men, utterly pure and saintly. In short, they live and act in the sight of God, not of men.

This is the true dignity and sublimity in the saintly fathers. Thus in our life, when we are exercised by the Word in the church and use the sacraments, we are also plagued by various trials, and our faith is tested like gold in a furnace. This is the true saintliness because of which we are called and are saints. For the Holy Spirit sanctifies through the Word taken hold of through faith, and He mortifies the flesh by means of sufferings and troubles, in order that the saints may be quickened and may present their bodies "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God," as Rom. 12:1 says. This is the highest stage of the life of the saints.

But lest we lose heart if we heard that the saintly fathers are set forth only in the highest stage and kind of life, God leads

them back from heaven to earth and describes them as completely worthless and as men of the lowest sort, so that nothing more common or worthless could be mentioned, except that their sins are not praised. Otherwise they are described in a completely meager manner, as though they were crawling in the dust of domestic and political life. For they are engaged in and busy with works that seem to be of no importance at all and without any saintliness, while the papists, on the contrary, seek and admire only the kind of life that is utterly withdrawn from and alien to secular occupations, domestic and political cares. That withdrawal from physical and secular duties they call sanctity and righteousness. But they are completely mistaken in every respect. For we should seek faith and righteousness in such a way that we pay tithes of mint and dill. Thus Christ says in Matt. 23:23: "These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others"; that is, because we dwell and live in the flesh, for this reason the flesh must be cared for, but without sin. The state and domestic affairs must be administered, since we are not yet in Paradise. Nor are we like the angels; but we live in the flesh, in a natural life which has need of food, drink, clothing, house, offspring, and agriculture. There is also need of political government and of protection against evil men. Therefore it is necessary to retain those two parts of this life. They are support and protection. The home supports and cherishes children and the household. The state defends and protects all these.

Accordingly, the saintly fathers, are described in a lowly and carnal manner in this lower stage of life, than which in the eyes of the papists there is nothing more sordid or worthless. Thus they say that nothing else is set forth than that they married wives, procreated offspring, milked cows and goats, etc., which are completely secular and heathenish works.<sup>1</sup> But the Lord has given us a true understanding, for which we should be thankful; for we can look into these matters more deeply than the papists, who see nothing else here except those carnal works. But these works are not so carnal as their own works, which are governed by the devil and are done without the Holy Spirit. For even though they fast, abstain from marriage, and murmur in the churches, yet

<sup>1</sup> This is a recurring theme of these *Lectures on Genesis*; cf. *Luther's Works*, 3, p. 43, and passim.

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