

LUTHER'S WORKS

VOLUME 6

LECTURES ON GENESIS

Chapters 31–37

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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 6

LUTHER's lectures on Gen. 31–37 (Weimar, XLIV, 1–304; St. Louis, II, 608–1159) carry the patriarchal narratives through the death of Isaac into the story of Joseph and his brethren. The last of the volumes of the *Lectures on Genesis* to appear in our edition, Volume 6 completes the English translation in eight volumes.

As was the case with the other volumes, we are obliged to reconstruct the chronological development of Luther's exposition from very meager data, some of them contained in *obiter dicta* that occur within the printed version and some of them available from other sources. Following the precedent set by Volume 5, we shall arrange these data in the order of the chapters of the Book of Genesis on which the lectures are based:

31:22-24 (p. 40): Luther refers to nine imperial diets that have taken place since the rebirth of the Gospel. The first of these would undoubtedly be Worms, 1521. It was followed by: Nuremberg, 1522; Nuremberg, 1524; Augsburg, 1525; Speyer, 1526; Speyer, 1529; Augsburg, 1530; Regensburg, 1532, moved to Nuremberg on account of the Turkish threat; Regensburg, 1541; Speyer, 1542; Nuremberg, 1542–1543; Speyer, 1544. Thus the "ninth" to which Luther refers would be the (third) Diet of Speyer, which opened on Feb. 9, 1542, and adjourned on April 11, 1542. The tenth would be the (third) Diet of Nuremberg, which met from July 13 to August 26, 1542, and from January 31 to August 23, 1543. Luther would then appear to have been lecturing on Gen. 31:22-24 after April 11, 1542, and before July 13, 1542.

34:1 (p. 187): In his discussion of the chronology of the story of Jacob, Luther mentions his earlier views regarding Jacob's return to Isaac, as these views were reflected in the first edition of his work on chronology, *Computation of the Years of the World* (1541). He indicates that he had changed them in the second edition (1545). If this quotation is accurate, it would have to fall into 1545. As we have

shown in the "Introduction to Volume 8," Luther's last lecture on Genesis was delivered on Nov. 17, 1545.

35:2 (p. 228): As he had many times before, Luther speaks of the possibility that a general council of the church is to be convened, and he criticizes a conception of its agenda that would concentrate on the reform of church structure, ritual, and morality rather than on "the Word and doctrine." The Council of Trent was convoked by Pope Paul III (whose pontificate extended from 1534 to 1549) in a bull dated May 22, 1542, but it was aborted by the political and military situation. On Nov. 19, 1544, the pope issued a new bull, summoning the council for March 15, 1545. It did not actually begin until Dec. 15, 1545. The indefiniteness of Luther's language would suggest that the council, often announced and as often postponed, did not seem to be in immediate prospect at the time. It would fit well into the winter of 1542/1543 or the following spring.

35:5 (pp. 243–244): Discussing current events, Luther reflects on the battles of the Turks and on those of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, who is now in "Belgium," viz., the Low Countries. Charles departed Spain for the campaign in Gelderland on May 12, 1543; the document granting freedom to Gelderland is dated September 1543. It seems plausible that these comments on Gen. 35:5 came sometime between those dates.

36:20-30 (pp. 296–302): A fragment from the *Lectures on Genesis*, the portion dealing with these verses, is preserved in a manuscript from Greifswald. The heading contains the date "October 16, 1543," which, as Meinhold points out, was a Tuesday, one of Luther's regular days in the classroom.

37 (pp. 313–407): On Dec. 17, 1543, Luther interrupted his exposition of Genesis to give a special series of lectures on "the Christmas Gospel from Isaiah," that is, Is. 9. In his introduction to these lectures, he stated: "Therefore if my health permits, I am suspending my lectures on Joseph and speaking during these days about the incarnation of the Son of God." As noted in the "Introduction to Volume 7," there is also external evidence that Luther was about to begin his exposition of the story of Joseph in September 1543.

37:12-17 (p. 349): Luther refers to an imperial diet that is now going on. In the light of the chronological information just listed, this can only mean the (fourth) Diet of Speyer, which was opened by Charles V on Feb. 20, 1544, and adjourned on June 10, 1544.

As we have noted in the appropriate place (p. 188, n. 1), the words put into Luther's mouth at Gen. 34:1 cannot be squared with the other information and must therefore be attributed to his editors. This would yield a chronology that is sparse but quite consistent: Luther began the lectures presented here in the spring of 1542 and continued them until early 1544. (In the light of this analysis, our suggestion in the "Introduction to Volume 7," that some of the material contained there could have come from November 1543, seems to have been mistaken.)

The basis of our translation has been, as always, the Weimar edition of the works of Luther. We have once more made corrections wherever they were obviously necessary, noting only those where the typographical error in the Weimar text would also have led to a Latin word. We have made conjectural emendations where they seemed to be called for either by other editions or by the sense of the passage; each of these is indicated in a footnote. And we have sought to identify quotations and allusions from Biblical, classical, patristic, and contemporary sources, amplifying or correcting references in the Weimar notes without explicitly calling attention to the changes. For the citations from Lyra, the *Glossa ordinaria*, and Paulus Burgensis we have used *Biblie iam pridem renovate pars prima* (Basel, 1502), referring to both page and note numbers, so that most references can be verified in other editions.

J. P.

LECTURES ON GENESIS

Chapters 31–37

Translated by
PAUL D. PAUL

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

1. *Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying: Jacob has taken all that was our father's; and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth.*

UP TO this point Moses has related those events which happened in the six years after the birth of Joseph. From that time Jacob began to take thought for the government and support of his household, for which he had made no provision at all in the previous 14 years. But after he had become the father of so many children, it occurred to him, almost too late, to make plans for the welfare of his household. But even as he suffered all the worst hardships with great endurance under a greedy master during the 14 years, so during this period of six years, by marvelous skill and by the blessing of the Lord, he gained property that was not to be despised. But not without envy. For he could not keep his wealth secret from his father-in-law and the latter's sons. Accordingly, when the six years had run their course, he made preparations to return to his fatherland, although without making haste. Perhaps he would even have remained longer had not a call from God intervened.

But to that mass of miseries which he endured in the house of Laban for so many years was added the malice and envy of the sons of the household, who accused him quite openly of plundering their father's property. "He heard," says Moses, "that the sons of Laban were saying, etc." He also saw that the countenance of Laban himself was changed and that his brow was wrinkled and sad. All these things he understood as signs of an estranged and hostile disposition. Listen, then, to the extraordinary false accusation of the sons of Laban as they reproach Jacob for this wealth, the reward of such long and hard servitude, and you will say that the whole world of iniquity had joined forces with greed. This is the reason for that statement in Ecclesiasticus (14:6): "There is nothing more wicked than a greedy man." And from the heathen we have the excellent saying of the actor Publilius Syrus: "A greedy man does nothing right except when he

dies.”¹ The unanimous voice and consensus of all of nature and all nations detests and condemns greedy men.

This is because they have idolatry and a general ungodliness implanted in their hearts, directed not only against outsiders and strangers but even against those belonging to their own household and those of their own flesh and blood, yes, daughters, grandchildren, and son-in-law. What could be thought more wicked and execrable than such a man, one who does not favor his own daughters or his wife with one morsel of bread? What will he do to a stranger and to one who is without any tie of relationship? Therefore nothing is more satisfactory, and a greedy man can do nothing better, than to die, because by living he lives neither for God nor for others nor for himself. Nothing else can he do but sin against God, against men, and against himself, for he never benefits even his very own body.

The sons of Laban, therefore, employ very full and strong words to express their envy. “Jacob has taken all that was our father’s,” they say. Don’t kill yourselves by lying! It is an exaggerated charge! “What wretched men we are!” they say. “We are ruined; what are we going to live on in the future? This fellow has pillaged all the property of our father; he has all but sucked us dry and completely consumed us.” This is how Moses depicts Laban and his sons: the sons followed in the footsteps of their father. “He has taken all,” they say. Yet Jacob served for 14 years and took no reward at all but slender fare and clothing. Everything else he yielded to Laban. Indeed, the latter would never have attained to such great wealth if Jacob had not come to him, as Jacob said above (cf. 30:30). Besides, he never stole anything, but with exceptional devotion he separated a very large flock of lambs of one color from his own flock of mottled lambs, which was much smaller and had been collected only with difficulty by diligence and divine inspiration. Nevertheless, in the meantime the other flock of Laban, which was quite numerous even before this, was also increased. Jacob separated only the fruit of his own toil, and from this he saved up those resources — slender enough, if they are compared with the enormous property of Laban.

From this speech of the sons of Laban, then, we gather what is the disposition and character of the greedy men. For they do not consider what they have in hand, their numerous flock, their abundant increase, but they only consider that Jacob has obtained a few sheep

¹ Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae*, 23. The original reads: *Avarus nisi cum moritur nihil recte facit*, but Luther quotes it as: *Avarus nihil recte facit, nisi cum moritur*.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

1. *Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him;*
2. *and when Jacob saw them, he said: This is God's army! So he called the name of that place Mahanaim.*

AFTER Laban had left, the holy patriarch Jacob, freed from the heavy and long misery of servitude under his father-in-law, rejoiced that peace and consolation had finally been restored to him after the completion of his tribulation. He then proceeded on the journey he had begun, that he might return to his dear father Isaac, who already for a long time had been weakened by old age.

But Moses says that as he went, the angels of God met¹ him and on seeing them he recognized them with great joy as God's army and God's host and called the name of this place מַחֲנֵיִם, for he said: "This host is God's host." But in Latin we cannot render the Hebrew word in the singular number. For it is a plural noun, or rather, a dual, a number which is also employed in Greek. ΜΑΧΑΡΙΑΙ means "two camps." These are words of joy and triumph for the patriarch with great confidence and a feeling of security because of the peace given to him by God, just as though he meant to say: "Now the angels are appearing, heaven is laughing, the stormy winter has passed, and now the clear and serene light of day is shining forth."

To this quiet joy of having now brought to an end all his troubles and difficulties there also comes this addition, that he has angels and God's army meeting him. But Moses also testified before this that the patriarchs frequently enjoyed appearances of angels, as he related above concerning Abraham, Hagar, and Jacob's ladder with its angels ascending and descending; also when Jacob was told to return to his fatherland. Yes, they often saw angels, and indeed, the excellent and holy fathers had special need of the sight of them. But here he sees not one angel but a host of angels. Luke also says (Luke 2:13): "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host."

The angels are called hosts, soldiers (στρατιῶται), watchmen,

¹ The Weimar text has *factus*, but we have read *factos*.

guides, and governors over God's creation. For this is their lower office. Their higher office is to sing: "Glory to God in the highest." Their lower duty is to watch and govern us and the creatures, and to fight not only on behalf of the godly but also on behalf of the ungodly, as is clear from Daniel (10:20), where the angel says that he is returning to fight against the prince of the Persians. But a good angel does not resist a good angel, and so the prince of the Persians was an evil angel of the number of those concerning whom Christ says (John 12:31): "Now shall the ruler of this world be cast out." Satan, the god of this world, has very large hosts of devils, and there is a kind of monarchy among the evil angels.

The matter speaks for itself, and Scripture demonstrates it quite clearly since, indeed, we see the world horribly embroiled, disturbed, confounded, and struck by horrible outrages. This comes about because the evil angels rule everywhere in the courts of the pope, the emperor, kings, and princes, yes, even in private homes. These are and are called works of the devil, which we see and experience, but the world does not see that murders and other infinite crimes are committed under the authority and at the instigation of the devil. All see the effect, but they do not see the cause. It is certain, therefore, that the leaders among the good angels fight against the leaders of the evil angels, for experience testifies to this. The heathen also retained a vague shadow of this knowledge when they invented their household gods² or good and evil genii. God is the Creator and Ruler of all men, and through the angels He controls the empires even of the ungodly, such as the Babylonians, Assyrians, and Persians, as Daniel testifies. The same is clear in our courts and their rulers. As a result of this, it comes to pass that the very best of causes are often hindered, disturbed, and protracted at the courts in various ways and yet at length favorable outcomes are obtained under the leadership and counsels of the good angels. These are the wonderful counsels of God, concerning which there can be no dispute why He governs the world in this or that manner.

But it is a matter of great and wonderful wisdom that Jacob can recognize the angels who meet him and that he can call them God's hosts, our Lord God's troops. Surely God does not have armies and hosts on earth? Yes, this is what Jacob calls all the angels. And he did not have this knowledge from his father-in-law Laban, who was

² A reference to the Roman *lares* and *penates*.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

1. *God said to Jacob: Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.*

SO FAR the patriarch Jacob has been in the greatest of grief and distress, one temptation rushing upon another. His only daughter had been defiled, and the Shechemites were slain. From this slaughter a great danger arose by which he himself and his whole house might have perished if God had not protected and rescued him when he was in danger. For all human help and protection was lacking, nor was there anyone to comfort the wretched and afflicted father. The sons replied proudly to his reproof and justified their very bad case. In this way, then, he hangs between heaven and earth, sick with cares and cruel griefs. To this is added weakness of faith, with which he is afflicted so severely that he forgets all the promises, which were truly splendid, and even his former rescues, in which he had experienced the hand and the help of the Lord.

Furthermore, these examples of the fathers are set forth for the churches to be read and learned so that the godly may see that they are disciplined in a wonderful manner through weakness and strength, through triumph and dejection, through good fortune and bad fortune so that by being tossed to and fro in various ways they might at length become martyrs, a very sweet odor and a "column of smoke," as is stated in the Song of Solomon (3:6), and that their flesh might be completely destroyed in them. Secondly, these examples teach us that our sufferings are trivial and light over against such troubles. Therefore let us seek consolation from here and prepare our hearts for patience. For we have not yet been smitten by such great difficulties and troubles as this one patriarch endured in his life.

But now in extreme necessity and despair, as it were, God comes to the help of His patriarch, as is stated in Ps. 9:9-10, and He is really a helper in need. For He does not forsake His saints who hope in Him, although they seem to be forsaken and cast off. For this is

what it means not to forsake those who are nearly forsaken. But God makes an affirmative out of a negative. When the godly say: "There is no help in God: I am lost," God replies: "You are not lost, and you will not be lost as you conclude, but I shall give you a mouth and wisdom even in the extremity of the greatest dangers so that you are not forsaken." It certainly appears to be a forsaking, but in reality it is not. Therefore God again sends forth His Word and comforts the troubled old man. We have often stated that in the legends of the saintly fathers it should be especially noted when God speaks with them.¹ Therefore the stories of the Holy Bible excel the stories of all other nations. For they are holy and useful because God is speaking there. They should not be scanned in a superficial manner like the legends of dumb saints, where God is not speaking, but the worth and treasure of these stories should be recognized and unfolded, namely, the Word of God, which He is speaking to the saintly fathers. But this is what makes them golden legends,² in comparison with which the examples of the Eremites are obviously obscured. Their men, indeed, lived according to the precepts of God and in faith, and therefore they deserve to be judged to have been great men. But in no way are they like the fathers whom God met in tribulation and for whom He caused a new sun to rise. Other legends cause an uproar by reason of their great and unusual miracles, but the stories of the fathers are not to be estimated from such works but rather by this holiness which is the Word of God.

Therefore after God sees that Jacob is forsaken and despised and ridiculed by his own sons and that they are not very much distressed for having brought their father into a very critical situation and for having made him very sad, He is present in season and comforts him. For his groaning filled heaven and earth. "Your prayer and tears," He wants to say, "compel Me to come to your aid. The things which seemed to threaten you with destruction will not harm you at all. I am the Lord your God! The Shechemites were killed by My permission, and this whole tragedy was enacted that I might prove you, discipline you, and make you approved and chosen. But be of good courage! I will restrain and check all the fury and raging of the people and change your grief and lamentation into joy. You will be a lord in Shechem, for so it has been ordained by Me."

¹ See, for example, *Luther's Works*, 3, pp. 1—12.

² Cf. *Luther's Works*, 29, p. 79, n. 14.

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