

LUTHER'S WORKS

VOLUME 7

LECTURES ON GENESIS

Chapters 38—44

JAROSLAV PELIKAN

Editor

WALTER A. HANSEN

Associate Editor

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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 7

LUTHER's lectures on Gen. 38—44 (Weimar, XLIV, 304—581; St. Louis, II, 1158—1655) continue the story of Joseph and his brothers, begun in Volume 6; Volume 8 will complete the story and the *Lectures on Genesis*.

In their present condition the lectures on these chapters contain even less evidence about the dates and circumstances of their delivery than does most of the commentary. There is a certain amount of external evidence from which one can surmise a little about the chronology. The two statements in the lectures to which some chronological significance can be attached are both rather indefinite. In the course of his comments on Gen. 39:13-15 (p. 92) Luther is quoted as saying: "Thus Eck recently found an end worthy of his deeds and words when, after losing his reason, he died miserably without acknowledging God and without calling upon Him." John Eck died on February 10, 1543; and on February 16, 1543, Veit Dietrich, one of the editors of these *Lectures on Genesis*, wrote to Luther to inform him of Eck's death and to tell him some of the circumstances surrounding it. Just how soon after that report Luther spoke the words attributed to him here is impossible to determine; but the death had occurred "recently," presumably a year or so before he spoke. The second chronological hint in these lectures occurs much later (p. 369), when Luther speaks cryptically of events 24 years earlier. If, as we have conjectured, he is referring to the Diet of Worms in 1521, that would put the date of the lectures on Gen. 44 into the year 1545.

External evidence seems to corroborate that date. On January 17, 1545, Luther wrote to Wenzeslaus Link: "I am near the end of Genesis, namely, at chapter 45." Thus the "24 years" would seem to fit the Diet of Worms quite well. From a statement by Moritz Heling it is evident that in September 1543 Luther was about to begin his exposition of the history of Joseph. On December 17, 1543, Luther said, in introducing his lectures on Is. 9: "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." We know (cf. *Luther's Works*, 6, Introduction) that on October 16, 1543, Luther had lectured on Gen. 36:20-30.

Assembling these meager data, we may conclude with some assurance that most of these lectures on Gen. 38-44 were delivered during 1544. The earlier ones, those on the first two chapters, may have been presented in November 1543; the last ones, those on Gen. 44, may have come early in January 1545. But the bulk of this material occupied Luther throughout 1544, interrupted by the Advent lectures on Is. 9 and the lectures for Lent and Easter on Is. 53. From other information we know also that 1544 was relatively free of the journeys and consultations that had deprived Luther's students of their professor for long periods in earlier years.

Like its predecessors, this volume is based on the text of the Weimar edition. But that text contains an unusual number of typographical errors in these chapters. Instead of calling attention to all of them, we have noted only those errors which have resulted in a Latin word differing from the original. In at least one instance we have discovered an error that seems to have been transmitted from one edition to the next without critical examination (p. 7, note 8); only the editorial scrutiny necessitated by the task of translating the *Lectures on Genesis* into English uncovered the error. Once more we have sought to verify and to identify Luther's quotations from the Bible, the classics, and the Christian tradition. We have managed to trace most of the quotations; a few have continued to elude us.

J. P.

LECTURES ON GENESIS

Chapters 38–44

Translated by
PAUL D. PAHL

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

1. *It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.*
2. *There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her,*
3. *and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er.*
4. *Again she conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Onan.*
5. *Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. She was in Chezib when she bore him.*

ON several occasions above I have suggested that the historical order should be observed in the narrative about the death of Isaac and the selling of Joseph. For Moses has used the figure which men call hysteron proteron, after the custom of other historians.¹ At the end of chapter 35 he said that Isaac, having fulfilled his days, died at the age of 180 (vv. 28-29). Later on, in chapter 37, he says that his father Isaac wept for Joseph (cf. v. 35). Therefore this chapter, too, should be considered carefully, and it should be noted that the events it embraces were enacted long before Isaac died or Joseph was sold. For Isaac lived until Joseph was elevated to the position of chief ruler of Egypt, a period of almost 13 years. And Judah went down to Shua the Adullamite,² married his daughter, and became the father of three sons by her, of whom two were killed during the lifetime of their grandfather Isaac and while his brother Joseph was still living in health and freedom with his father. Then seven or eight years elapsed before Joseph was sold. Therefore all those

¹ On the problem of hysteron proteron in Genesis cf. *Luther's Works*, 4, p. 300, note 1.

² As his later discussion (p. 6) makes clear, Luther takes Shua as the name of a man, despite the tendency in portions of the exegetical tradition to read it as a woman's name because of its feminine ending.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

1. *When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons: Why do you look at one another?*
2. *And he said: Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live, and not die.*

ALL this takes place to provide an opportunity to glorify Joseph and to show forth the wonderful works of God. The history itself is easy enough. Only certain grammatical and theological points must be explained. At the end of the preceding chapter Moses said that the famine prevailed all over the earth and that for this reason people gathered from all regions to buy food in Egypt (Gen. 41:57). In the meantime, however, Jacob, together with his people, also began to be hungry. Therefore he addresses his sons in this manner and urges them to go to buy grain.

But the word שָׁבַר occurs again. Above we interpreted it as meaning “to break,” and in this passage the words read as follows in the Hebrew: “Seeing that there is a breaking in Egypt.” But we who do not know the Hebrew language must accustom ourselves to these ways of speaking and to the new words in order that we may understand correctly their force and proper meaning.

The Jews offer the nonsensical explanation that it is called a breaking because he breaks the famine.¹ But I hate this vanity and levity of the rabbis, who are forever trying to force their nonsense on us as grammar and theology, without any regard for the expressions in Holy Scripture from which an explanation of this and other words can be taken. For the prophets speak this way, as in Is. 58:7: “Share [break] your bread with the hungry.” And Jeremiah says in Lam. 4:4: “No one gives [breaks] to them,” that is, divides. For the Jews had loaves of bread like cakes, but they did not need knives to cut them. And the same thing can be seen in the Gospel account where the disciples recognize Christ from the breaking of bread (Luke 24:30-31), likewise when it is said that He took the bread and broke it (Luke

¹ Cf. Lyra *ad* Gen. 41:57.

[W, XLIV, 459, 460]

22:19). It has also been referred to the soul, as in Ps. 14:4. In Is. 59:7 we read: "Destruction and misfortune are in their highways." Likewise a broken spirit (Ps. 51:17), that is, a sad and afflicted spirit which is divided into many thoughts and counsels from which one knows no way out.

Accordingly, one must note this way of speaking, namely, that for the Hebrews the breaking of bread is the same as dividing, or the piecemeal selling or buying of food and victuals. The translation has come about by means of a kind of analogy. In the Prophets, however, it occurs more frequently than elsewhere. Solomon has also employed this way of speaking in Prov. 11:26. "A blessing," he says, "is on the head of him who breaks, that is, distributes, sells, grain." For the Hebrews use words not only in their proper meanings but also in figurative meanings, after the fashion of other languages. Indeed, they, more than others, seem to take very great delight in figurative speech.

Then one must also note that the Hebrews lacked the substantive verb "I am" and used the pronoun "I" in its place. For example, "I, the Lord your God." Here "I" is used in place of "I am," and "He" is used in place of "He is." For example, "The Lord your God, He." Therefore the word *אֵשׁ* is not used substantively or copulatively in this place but means "it is at hand," or "it is abundant," or "grain superabounds." From this comes the word *תְּרוּמָה* in Proverbs, where wisdom says: "Mine is the counsel and success; I give counsel and *תְּרוּמָה*, that is, the deed or success, or the execution in any business whatever. Mine is the voice and deed. Mine it is to speak and do, that is, whatever I counsel I also perform." (Cf. 8:14.) This is the force of the word *תְּרוּמָה*, namely, to put a thing in its place. Otherwise it is a common word meaning "cause," "wisdom," "glory"; but properly it means the effect of deliberations or counsels, just as God counsels by means of the spoken Word; and when we firmly retain this Word, the *תְּרוּמָה* of the things He promises inevitably follows. Thus in this passage there are not only words or an uncertain rumor about the "breaking," but there is the deed itself and a supply of grain in Egypt.

Therefore Jacob says to his sons: "Why do you look at one another?" For the word used here belongs to the fourth conjugation and is the Hithpael.² "Why are you making yourselves look?" Moses means that the sons of Jacob deliberated and argued about what should be done, now that the famine was growing worse. "What

² This is apparently based on Johannes Reuchlin (cf. *Luther's Works*, 4, p. xi).

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

1. *Now the famine was severe in the land.*
2. *And when they had eaten the grain which they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them: Go again, buy us a little food.*
3. *But Judah said to him: The man solemnly warned us, saying: You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.*
4. *If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food;*
5. *but if you will not send him, we will not go down; for the man said to us: You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.*

AFTER Jacob had replied to the request of his sons about sending Benjamin to Egypt and had refuted their rhetorical reasons with his weightiest arguments, another, more advantageous opportunity is now presented to prevail upon their father and to force his son from him — the son whom he, with an obstinate heart, was planning to keep with him. The famine had become so great in the whole land that his whole household would have to perish from hunger if they did not return to Egypt and bring grain from there. And I do not doubt that many others in the land of Canaan and in other places perished from hunger.

Therefore with this one argument they restrain and overcome their father, who was clinging most obstinately to his opinion. They convince him that he, together with the little children and the whole household, will perish and that even if Benjamin remains at home with his father, he will not be saved and remain alive if his father does not entrust him at this time to the uncertainty of fortune and to the will of the ruler of Egypt. "Look, dear father, at what you are doing," they said, "lest you destroy us all and yourself by being afraid to lead one son into danger, which in any case is very slight. Or it could be that there will be no danger at all when we come to Egypt." Accordingly, their father, overcome by this last and very harsh dart

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