

CURRENT TEACHING SERIES

EPIC TALES

A dramatic scene of a whale's tail fluke breaching the surface of a turbulent, dark blue ocean under a stormy sky with rain falling. The whale's tail is dark and glistening with water, creating a powerful focal point on the left side of the frame.

**RELEARNING THE ANCIENT BIBLE
STORIES IN A BRAND-NEW WAY**

Jacob's Ladder



EPIC TALES

Genesis chapter 27

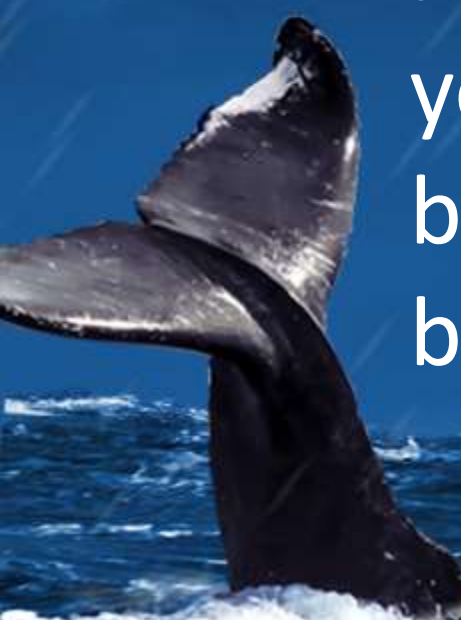
EPIC TALES

What has
already
happened
in the
story?

One day Esau comes home from hunting. He is famished and wants the stew his twin brother Jacob has fixed. Jacob offers a bowl for a birthright. Both men are hungry and the deal is done. Esau gets a bowl of soup and Jacob gets a birthright, his older brother's right to a double share of the inheritance and the title of number one son. But Jacob is still hungry and wants more. He wants his father's blessing which rightfully belonged to Esau as the firstborn son. He lies to and deceives his father, Isaac. "Yes, it's me Esau, your firstborn" Jacob says to Isaac. Jacob steals Esau's blessing from their father, Isaac.

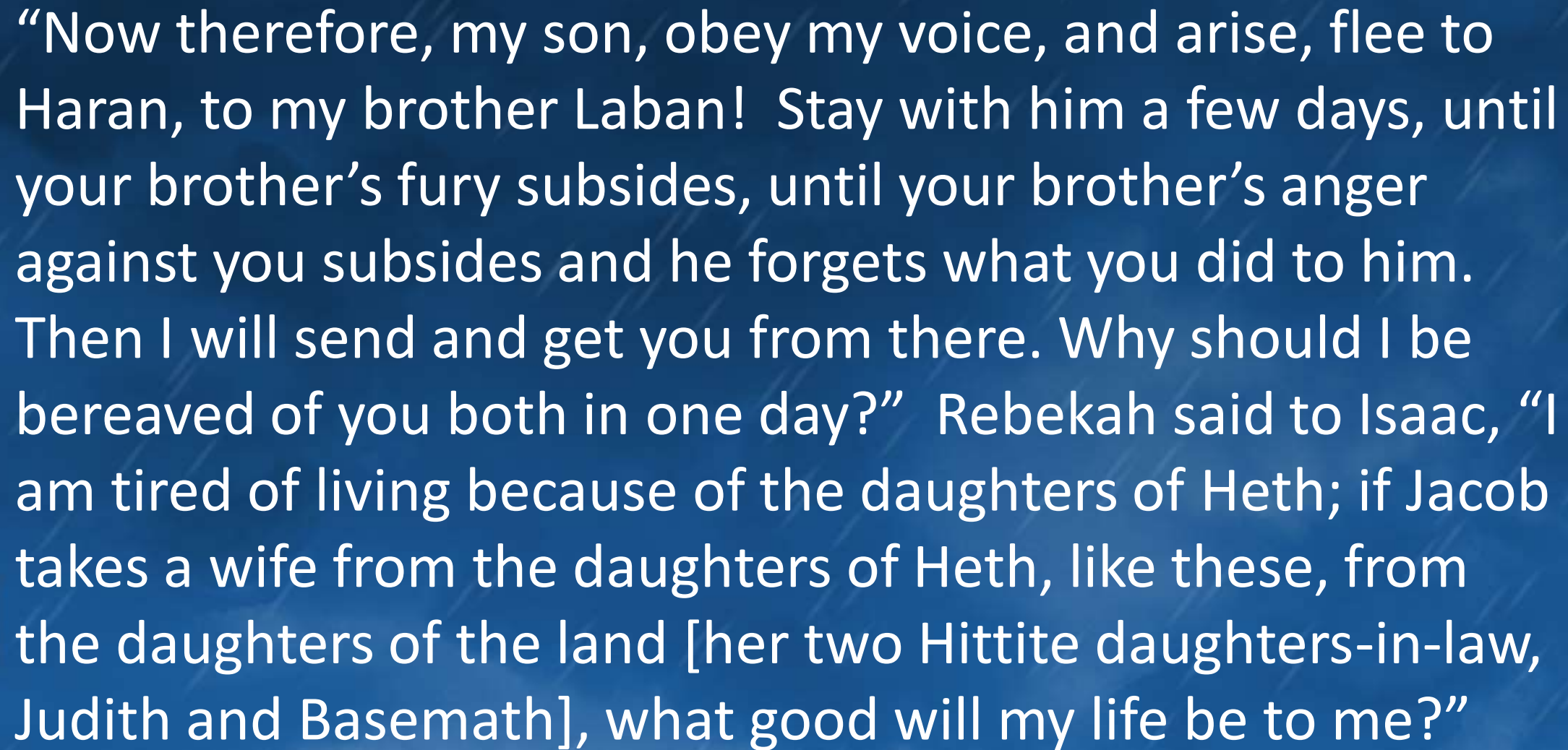
Source: Michael K. Marsh

EPIC TALES

A photograph of a whale's tail fluke emerging from the blue ocean, set against a background of a blue sky with light rays. The whale's tail is dark and has a white patch near the tip. The water is a deep blue with white foam from the tail's movement.

So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.” Now when the words of her elder son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent and called her younger son Jacob, and said to him, “Behold your brother Esau is consoling himself concerning you by planning to kill you.” Genesis 27:41-42

EPIC TALES



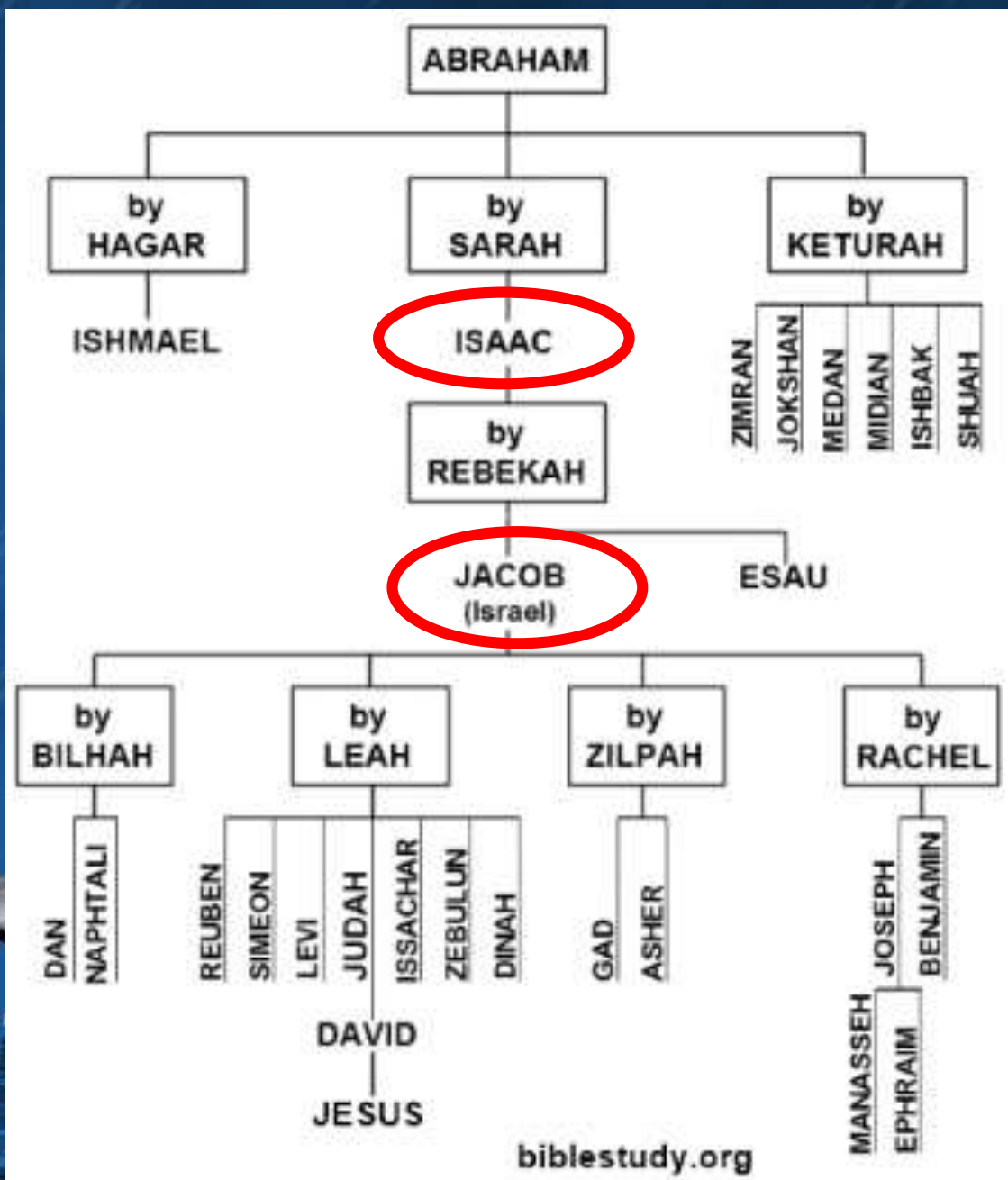
“Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, flee to Haran, to my brother Laban! Stay with him a few days, until your brother’s fury subsides, until your brother’s anger against you subsides and he forgets what you did to him. Then I will send and get you from there. Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?” Rebekah said to Isaac, “I am tired of living because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land [her two Hittite daughters-in-law, Judith and Basemath], what good will my life be to me?”

Genesis 27:43-46

EPIC TALES

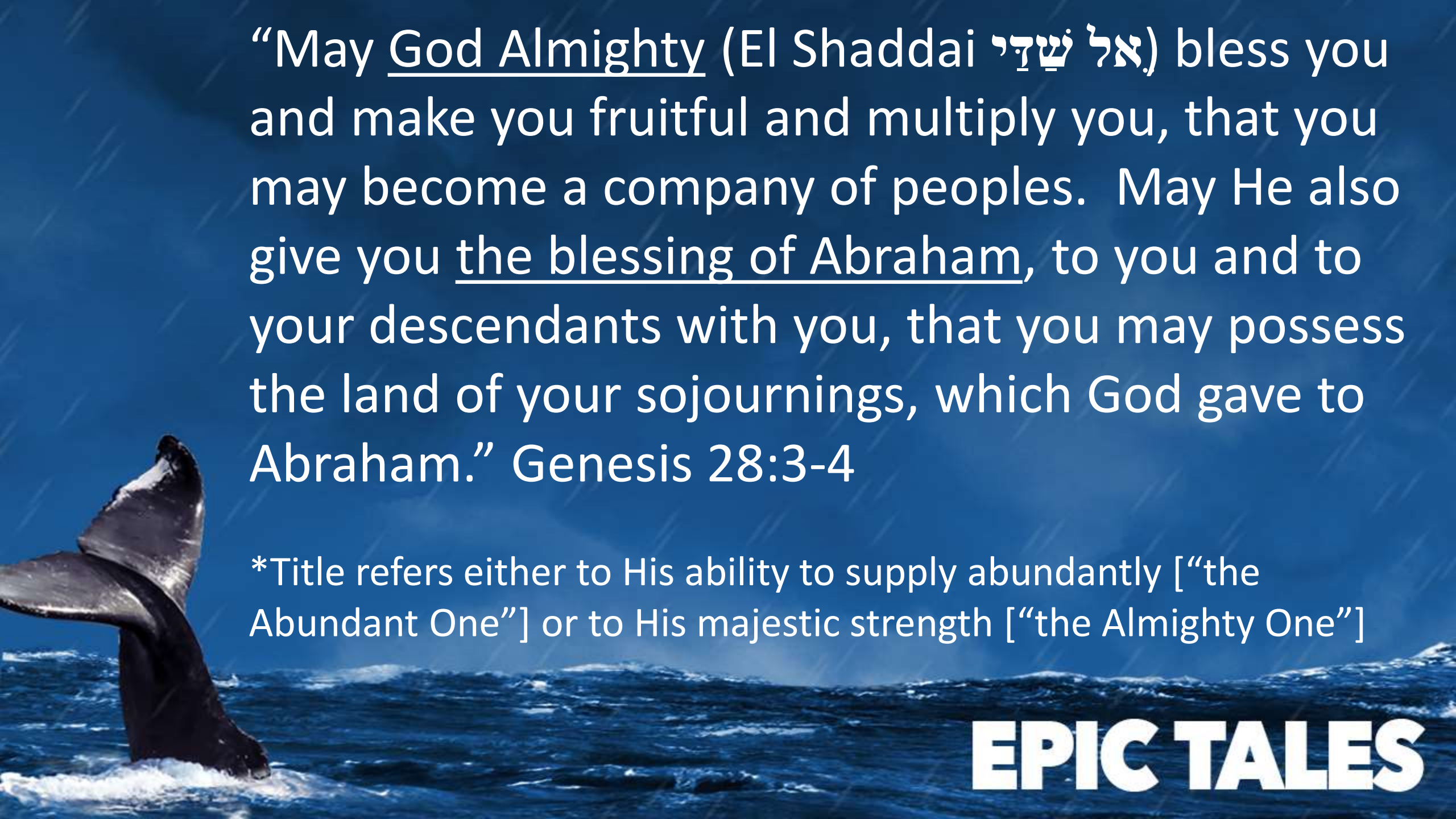
Genesis chapter 28

EPIC TALES



So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, and said to him, “You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother.”
 Genesis 28:1-2

EPIC TALES

A photograph of a whale's tail breaching the surface of the ocean. The tail is dark and curved, with white foam at the point of exit. The water is a deep blue with white-capped waves. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

“May God Almighty (El Shaddai אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי) bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you, that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham.” Genesis 28:3-4

*Title refers either to His ability to supply abundantly [“the Abundant One”] or to His majestic strength [“the Almighty One”]

EPIC TALES

Blessings previously given by God

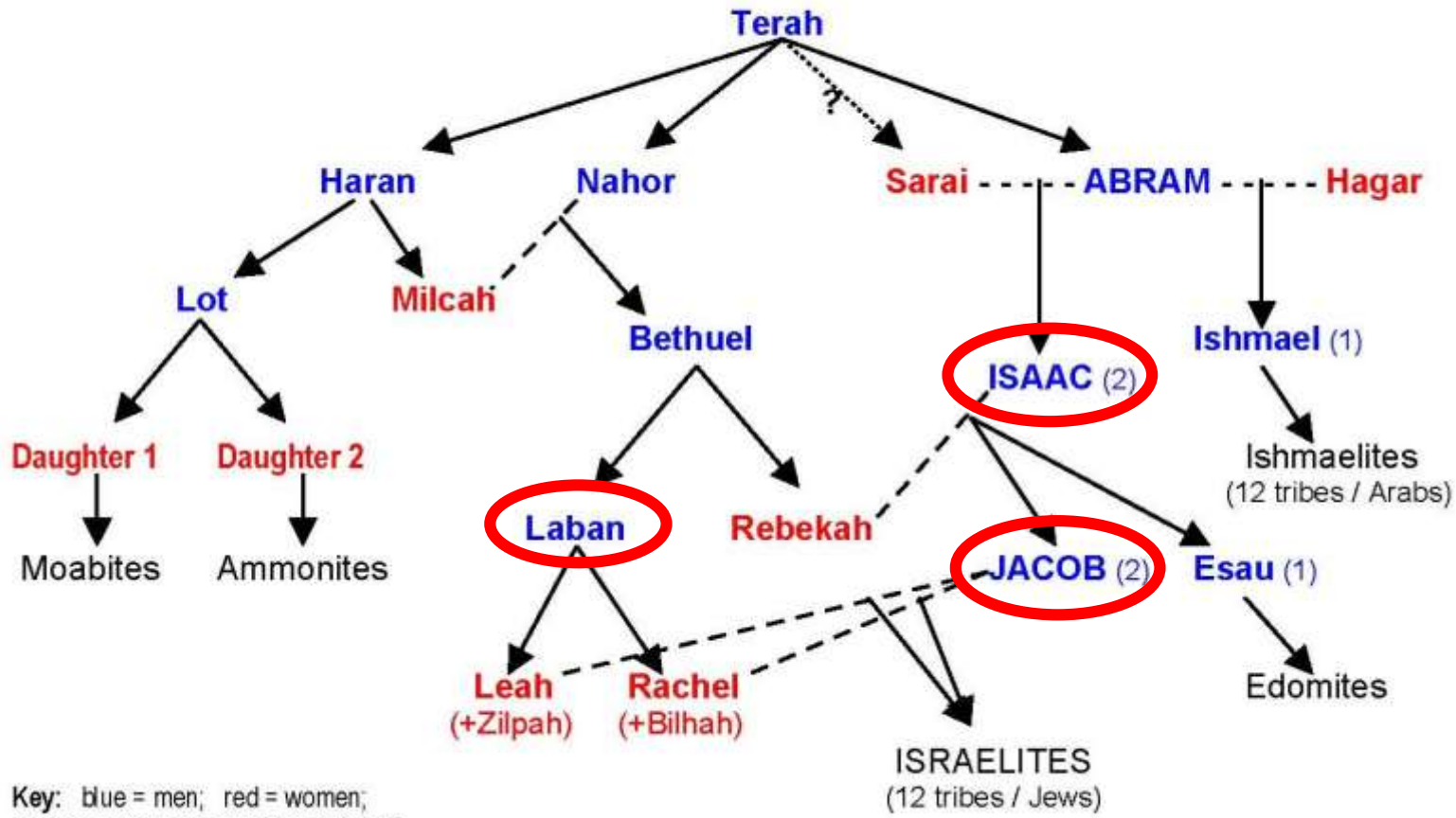
And He [God] took him [Abram] outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:5-6

A photograph of a whale's tail fluke emerging from the dark blue ocean, creating white foam at the base. The background is a clear, deep blue sky.

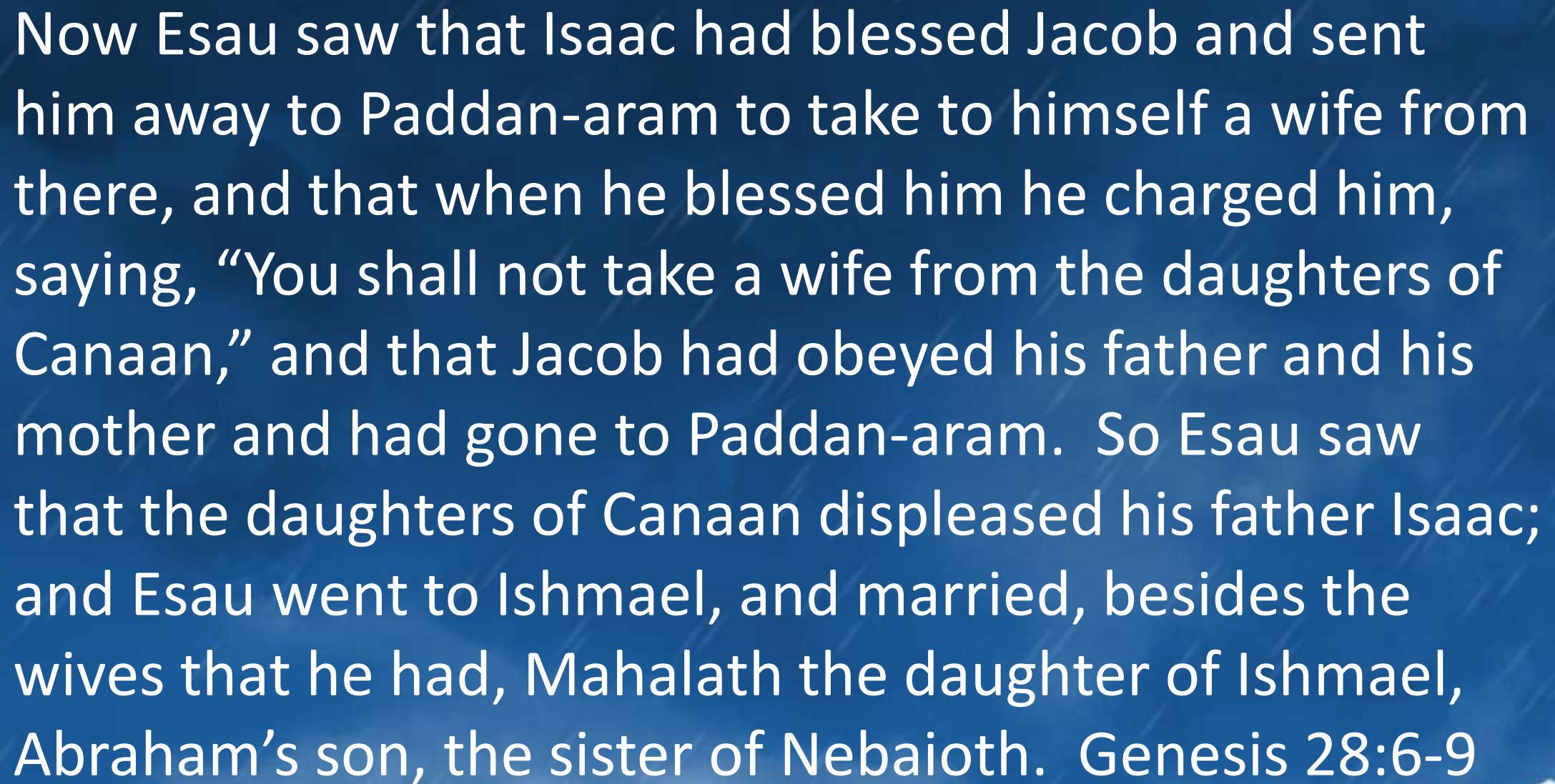
EPIC TALES

Family of Abraham



Then Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram to **Laban**, son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau. Genesis 28:5

EPIC TALES

A whale tail is seen breaching the surface of the ocean, creating a splash of white water. The background is a clear, deep blue sky. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take to himself a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he charged him, saying, “You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan,” and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Paddan-aram. So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac; and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebaioth. Genesis 28:6-9

EPIC TALES

Then Jacob departed from Beersheba
and went toward Haran.
Genesis 28:10

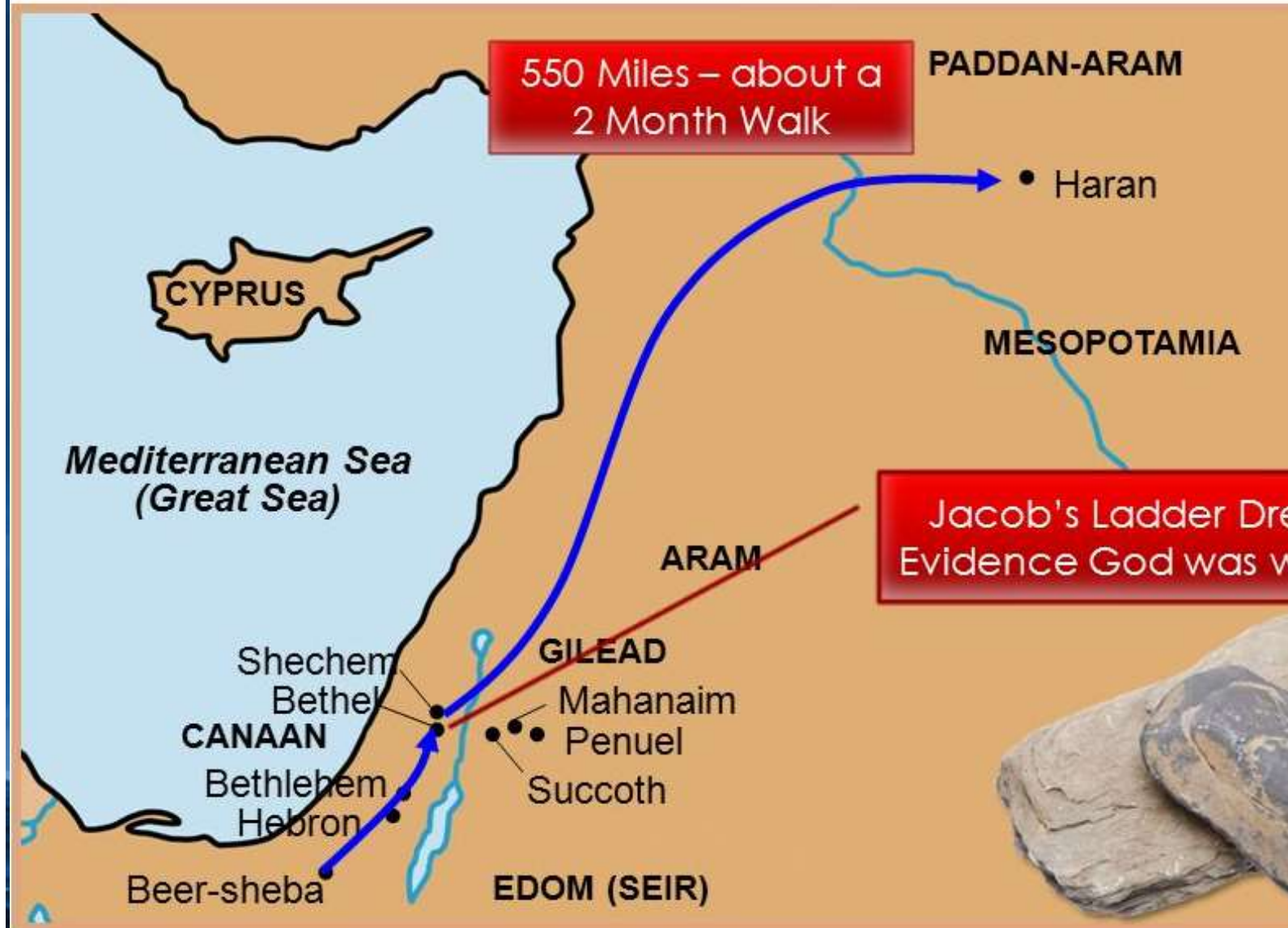
Jacob was Homeless, Helpless, Alone

Source: Ray Pritchard

EPIC TALES



Jacob's Journey



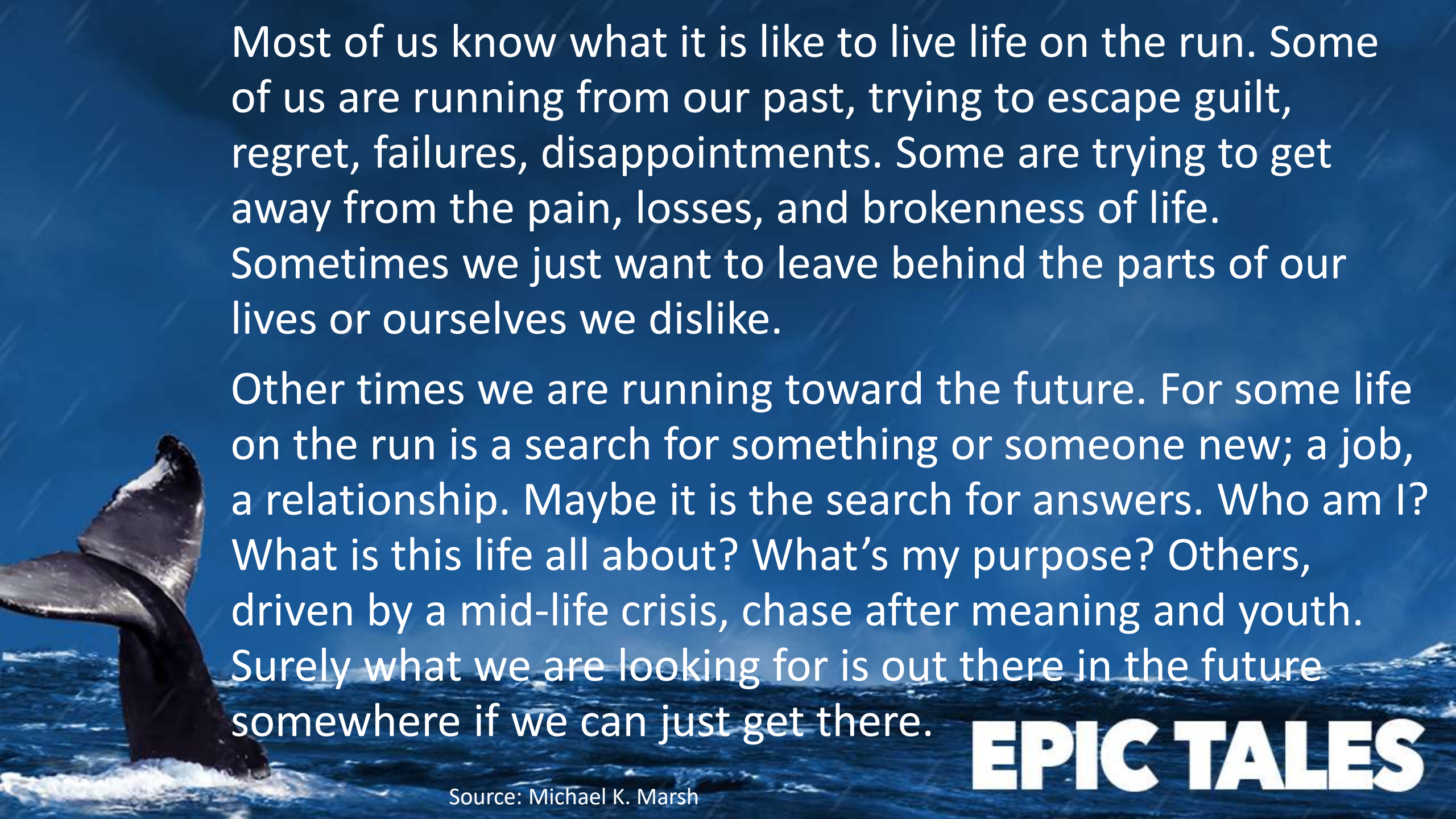
A journey of 550 miles, Jacob is on his way from Beersheba to Haran in Paddan-Aram, located near modern-day Turkey.

Jacob was retracing the steps of his grandfather Abraham who came from Haran to the Promised Land many years ago. Abraham left behind a clan that grew and prospered over the years. It was natural that Rebekah would think of Haran when she needed a safe haven for her youngest son.

It was far enough that Esau wouldn't follow him there. Yet there was family there, so Jacob wouldn't be alone.

By sending Jacob to Haran, Rebekah was putting him in a safe place for a few months until Esau's anger passed away. Then she would send word for Jacob to come home. In the meantime, she hoped that her son would marry one of his relatives in Haran and eventually return home, bride in hand.

Source: Ray Pritchard

A photograph of a whale's tail breaching the surface of the ocean. The tail is dark and curved, with white foam at the point of exit. The background is a clear, bright blue sky. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Most of us know what it is like to live life on the run. Some of us are running from our past, trying to escape guilt, regret, failures, disappointments. Some are trying to get away from the pain, losses, and brokenness of life. Sometimes we just want to leave behind the parts of our lives or ourselves we dislike.

Other times we are running toward the future. For some life on the run is a search for something or someone new; a job, a relationship. Maybe it is the search for answers. Who am I? What is this life all about? What's my purpose? Others, driven by a mid-life crisis, chase after meaning and youth. Surely what we are looking for is out there in the future somewhere if we can just get there.


EPIC TALES

He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place.

Genesis 28:11

A photograph of a whale's tail fluke emerging from the dark blue ocean. The tail is dark and has a lighter patch near the tip. The water is choppy with small whitecaps.

EPIC TALES

A photograph of a whale's tail fluke emerging from the blue ocean, set against a background of a blue sky with light rain or mist. The whale's tail is dark and curved, with white foam at the base where it meets the water.

He [Jacob] had a dream, and behold, a ladder [*sulam* סֻלָּם often translated as “stairway”] was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. Genesis 28:12

*Our relationship with God and our conversations with Him are designed to be 2-way

EPIC TALES



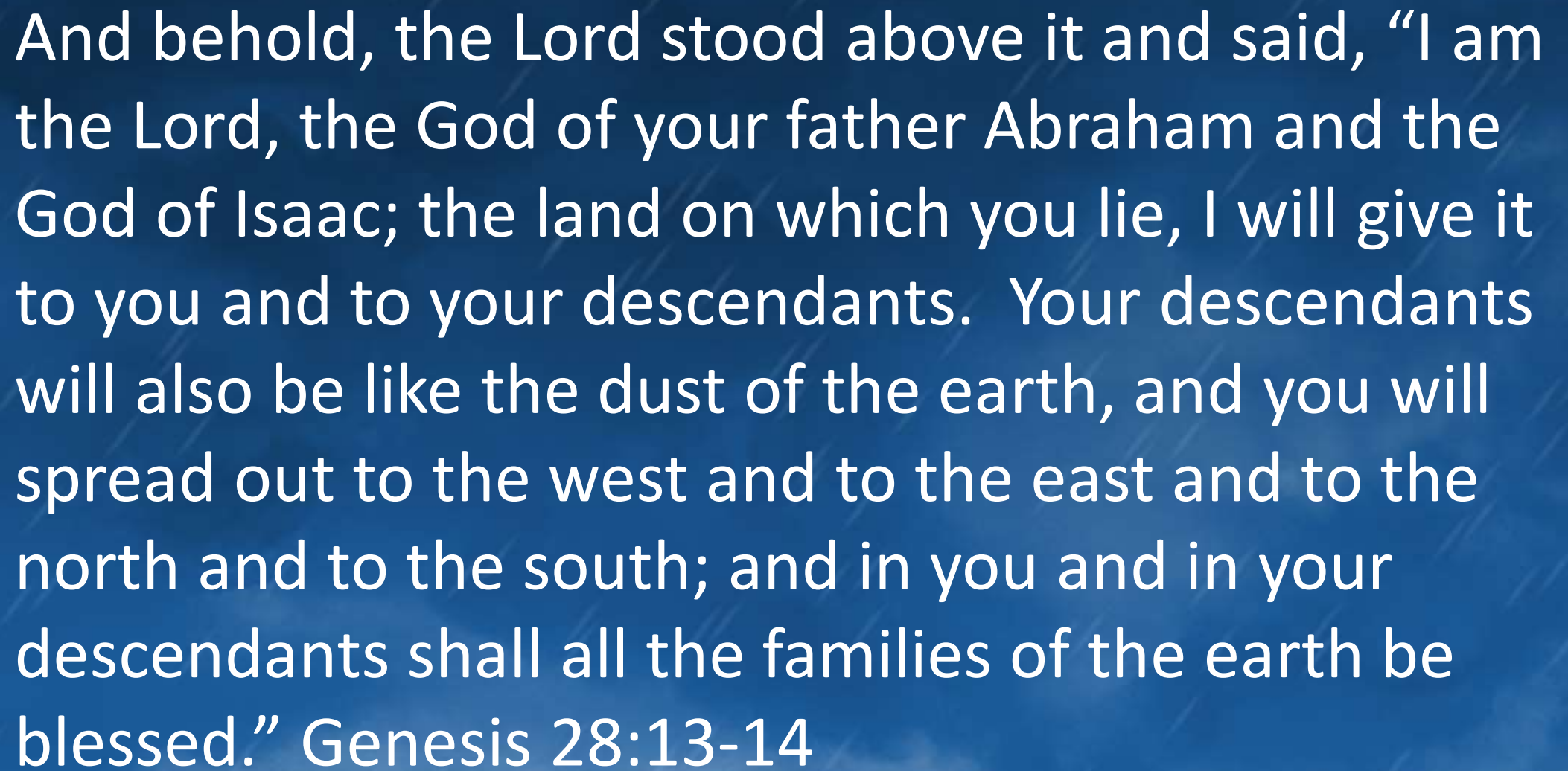
Last Week vs. This Week

Jacob's Ladder stands in direct contrast to the Tower of Babel. The Tower of Babel was man's attempt to reach God. It represents all of man's efforts, and man's attempts to ascend to the heavens. But here we see a ladder or stairway. The Tower of Babel is man's way, and this stairway is God's way. The ladder is a representation of Messiah Jesus, the only way to God. This vision shows Jacob that there is a way to God, but it's God's way, not man's way. We see the angels going up and down, showing us the providential care of God. These angels... these ministering spirits are going back and forth, doing God's will. God is at the top of the stairs, or ladder, and that's symbolizing that He's the one sending these angels on their tasks.

Source: Ken McKinley

EPIC TALES



A photograph of a whale's tail fluke rising out of the ocean. The water is a deep blue with white foam at the base of the tail. The background is a clear, bright blue sky.

And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” Genesis 28:13-14

EPIC TALES



“Behold, I am with you
and will keep you
wherever you go, and will
bring you back to this
land; for I will not leave
you until I have done what
I have promised you.”
Genesis 28:15

EPIC TALES

What did God promise Jacob?

God reaffirmed the promises made to Abraham and Isaac

1. I will give you this land. (Genesis 28:13)
2. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth. (28:14)
3. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you. (28:14)
4. I will watch over you wherever you go. (28:15)
5. I will bring you back to this land. (28:15)
6. I will not leave you. (28:15)

Source: Ray Pritchard

EPIC TALES

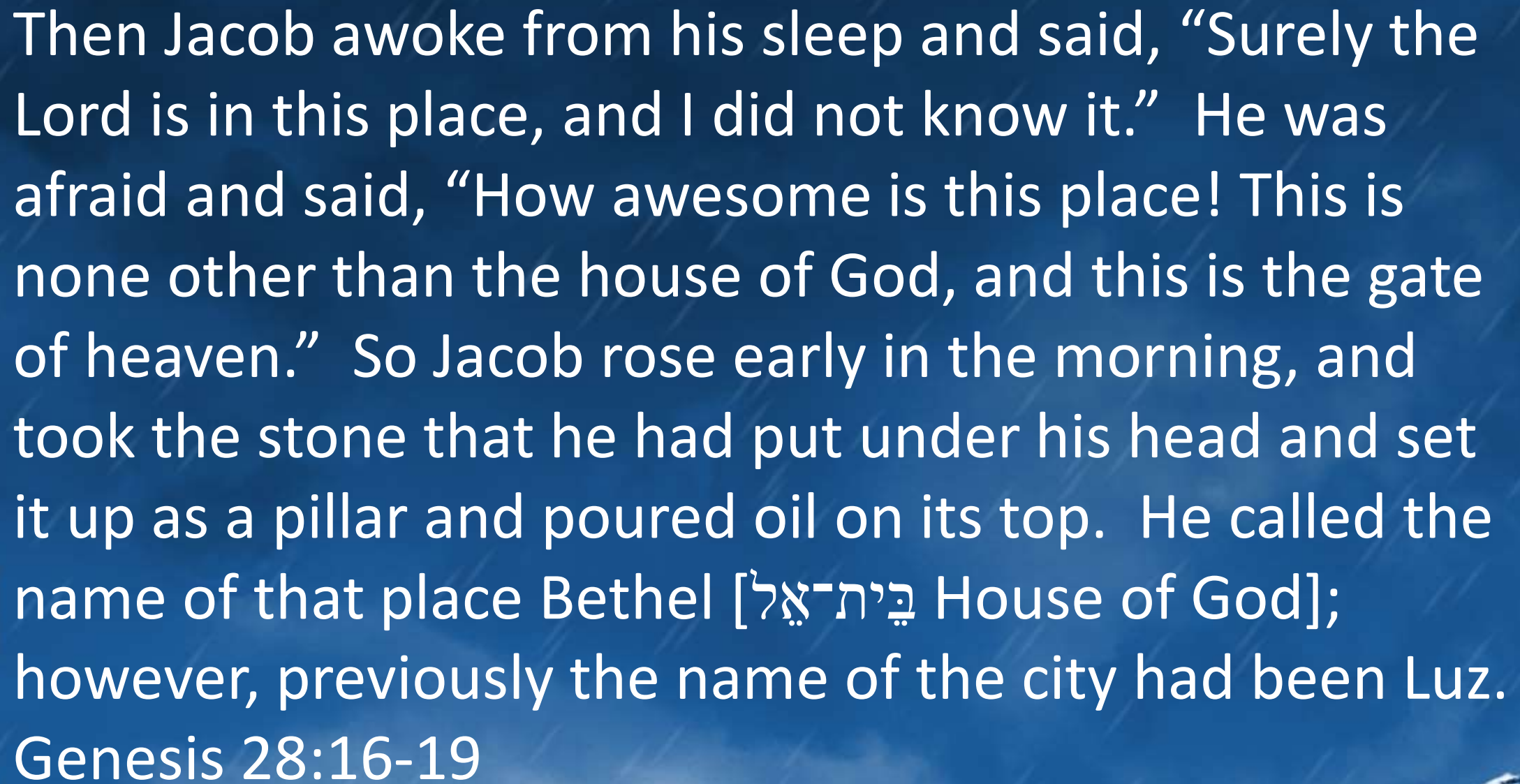
The accompanying presence of God

Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19-20

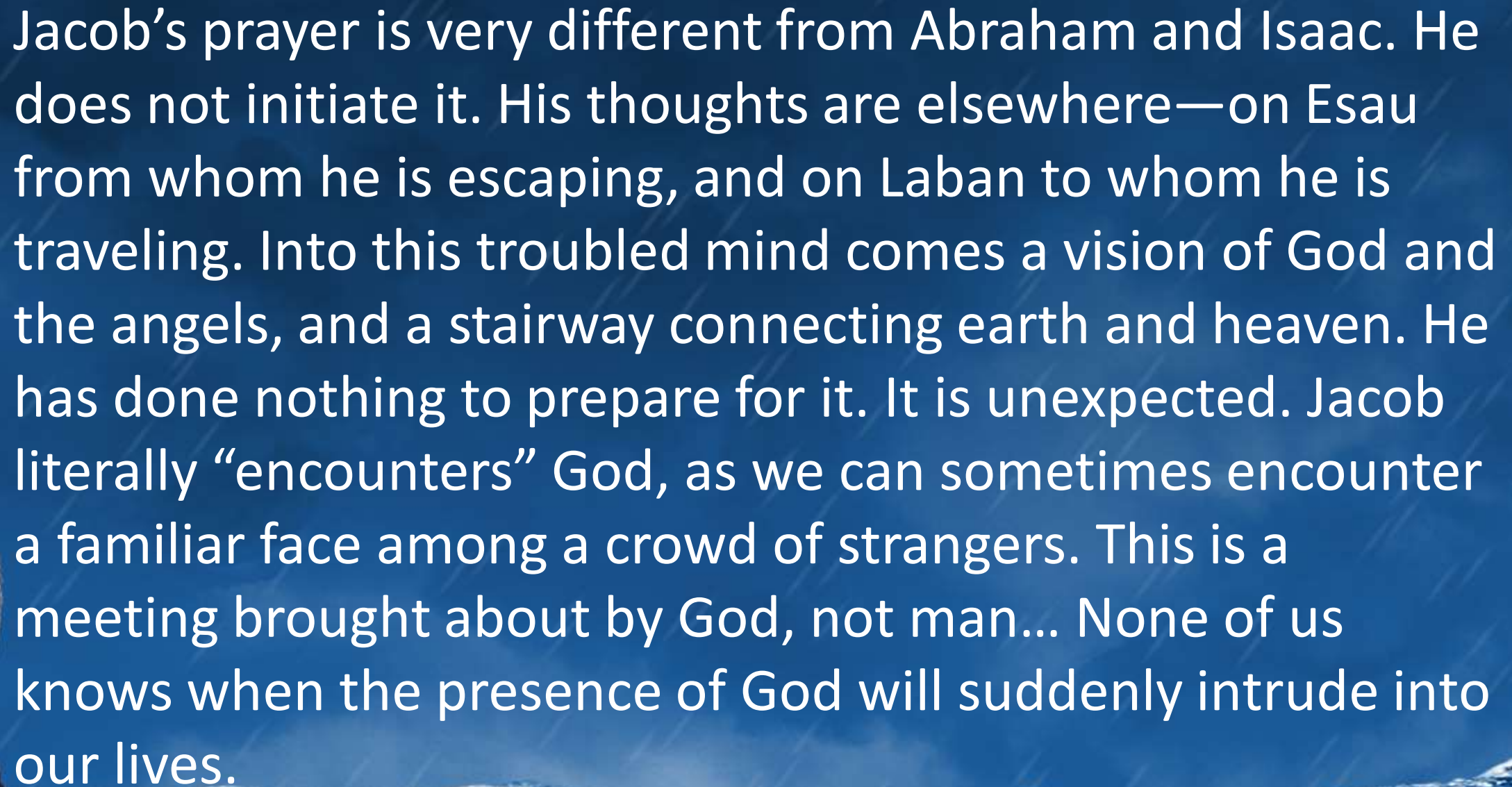
EPIC TALES



A photograph of a whale's tail fluke emerging from the blue ocean under a clear sky. The whale is dark grey, and the water is a vibrant blue with white foam at the base of the tail.

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. He called the name of that place Bethel [בֵּית-אֵל House of God]; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz.
Genesis 28:16-19

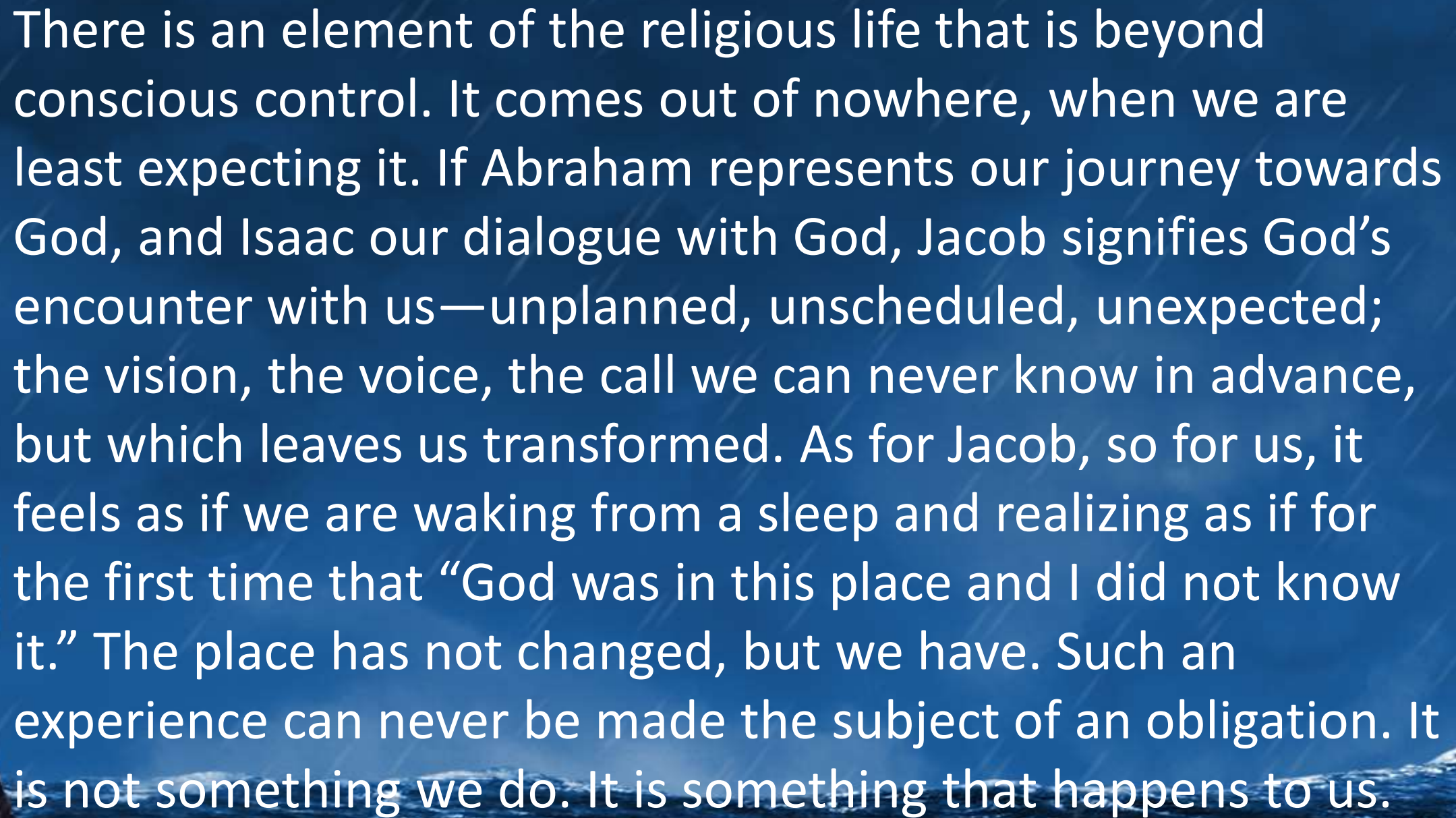
EPIC TALES

A whale's tail fluke is seen breaching the surface of the ocean, creating a splash of white water. The background is a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Jacob's prayer is very different from Abraham and Isaac. He does not initiate it. His thoughts are elsewhere—on Esau from whom he is escaping, and on Laban to whom he is traveling. Into this troubled mind comes a vision of God and the angels, and a stairway connecting earth and heaven. He has done nothing to prepare for it. It is unexpected. Jacob literally “encounters” God, as we can sometimes encounter a familiar face among a crowd of strangers. This is a meeting brought about by God, not man... None of us knows when the presence of God will suddenly intrude into our lives.

Source: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks


EPIC TALES

A photograph of a whale's tail breaching the surface of the ocean. The tail is dark and curved, with white foam at the base where it meets the water. The background is a clear, bright blue sky. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

There is an element of the religious life that is beyond conscious control. It comes out of nowhere, when we are least expecting it. If Abraham represents our journey towards God, and Isaac our dialogue with God, Jacob signifies God's encounter with us—unplanned, unscheduled, unexpected; the vision, the voice, the call we can never know in advance, but which leaves us transformed. As for Jacob, so for us, it feels as if we are waking from a sleep and realizing as if for the first time that “God was in this place and I did not know it.” The place has not changed, but we have. Such an experience can never be made the subject of an obligation. It is not something we do. It is something that happens to us.

Source: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks


EPIC TALES



Such experiences take place, literally or metaphorically, at night. They happen when we are alone, afraid, vulnerable, close to despair. It is then that, when we least expect it, we can find our lives flooded by the radiance of the divine. Suddenly, with a certainty that is unmistakable, we know that we are not alone, that God is there, and has been all along, but that we were too preoccupied by our own concerns to notice Him. That is how Jacob found God—not by his own efforts, like Abraham; not through continuous dialogue, like Isaac; but in the midst of fear and isolation. Jacob, in flight, trips and falls—and finds he has fallen into the waiting arms of God. No one who has had this experience ever forgets it. “Now I know that You were with me all the time, but I was looking elsewhere.”

Source: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks


EPIC TALES



That was Jacob's prayer. There are times when we speak, and times when we are spoken to. Prayer is not always predictable, a matter of fixed times and daily obligation. It is also an openness, a vulnerability. God can take us by surprise, waking us from our sleep, catching us as we fall.

Source: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

EPIC TALES



The vertical axis of God's life, Jacob's ladder, intersects the horizontal axis of our life and running. That point of intersection is always an awesome place, the house of God, and the gate of heaven.

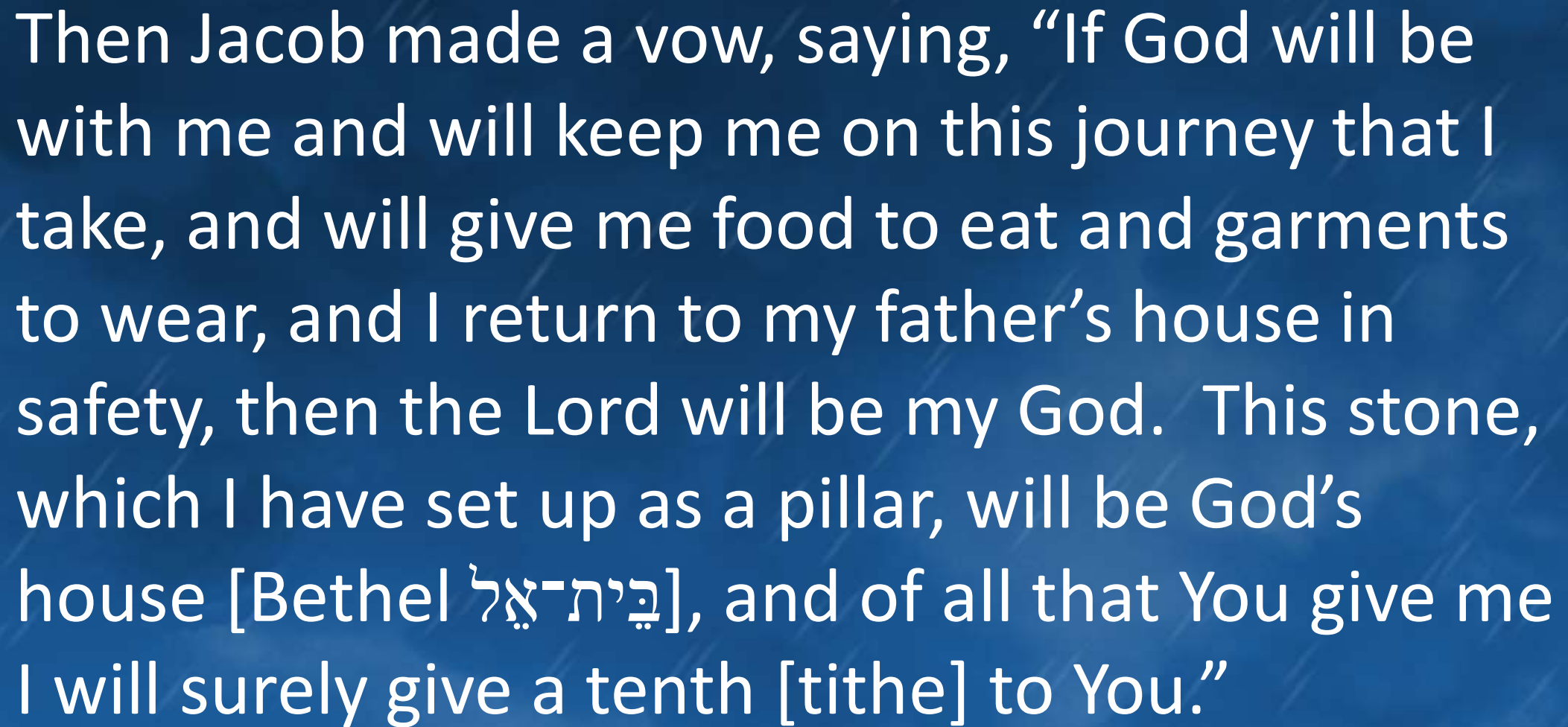
Jacob's ladder reveals the connection between heaven and earth, divinity and humanity, the uncreated and the created. It appears at every moment in our life, even life on the run. The ladder Jacob saw was not in a physical location. It was within him. It was not a vision but a dream.

Through Jacob God reveals that the ladder of His love, His life, and His connection to us is found deep within ourselves, a place so deep that it is seen in the gift of a dream. We call it Jacob's ladder but it is not possessed by Jacob. It is God's ladder placed in each one of us.

The miracle is not that God shows up and breaks into our lives. That is always happening. The miracle is that we recognize it within ourselves. The ladder is revealed in the lives of fugitives, in the dark places of life where the sun has set, in the hard places, in the in between places – in places we never would have expected. “Surely the Lord in this place – and I did not know it.”

Source: Michael K. Marsh

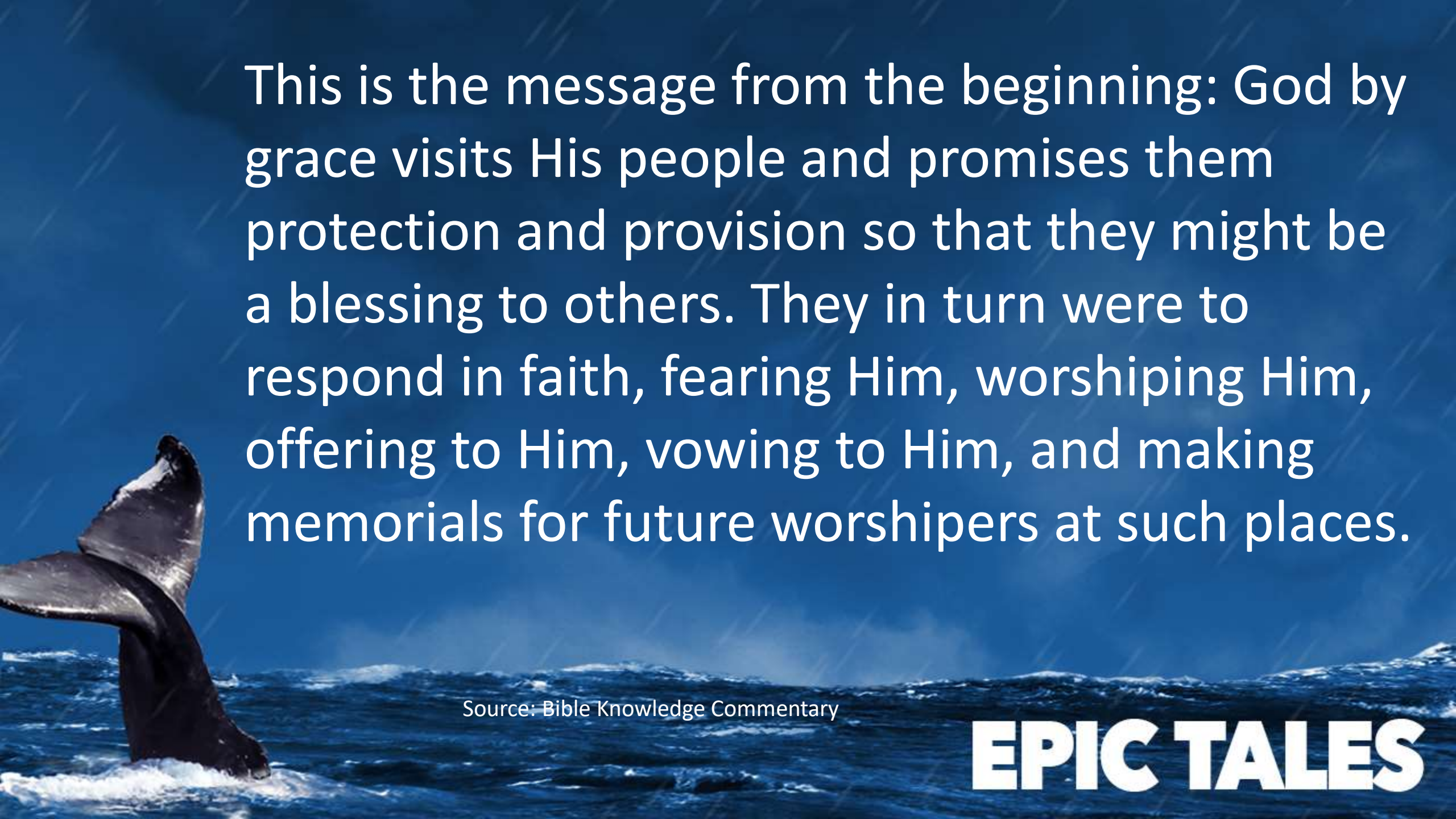
EPIC TALES

A photograph of a whale's tail fluke rising out of the ocean. The water is a deep blue with white foam at the base of the tail. The background is a clear, bright blue sky.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father’s house in safety, then the Lord will be my God. This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God’s house [Bethel בֵּית-אֵל], and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth [tithe] to You.”

Genesis 28:20-22

EPIC TALES

A photograph of a whale's tail fluke emerging from the ocean, set against a deep blue sky and sea. The whale's tail is dark and curved, with white markings on its underside. The water is a vibrant blue with white foam from the whale's splash.

This is the message from the beginning: God by grace visits His people and promises them protection and provision so that they might be a blessing to others. They in turn were to respond in faith, fearing Him, worshiping Him, offering to Him, vowing to Him, and making memorials for future worshipers at such places.

Source: Bible Knowledge Commentary

EPIC TALES

What about us today?


- Our world is hurting, and we wonder if God will speak to us during these difficult days
- We wonder if we can find the stairway, the ladder, to the presence of God

EPIC TALES

John chapter 1

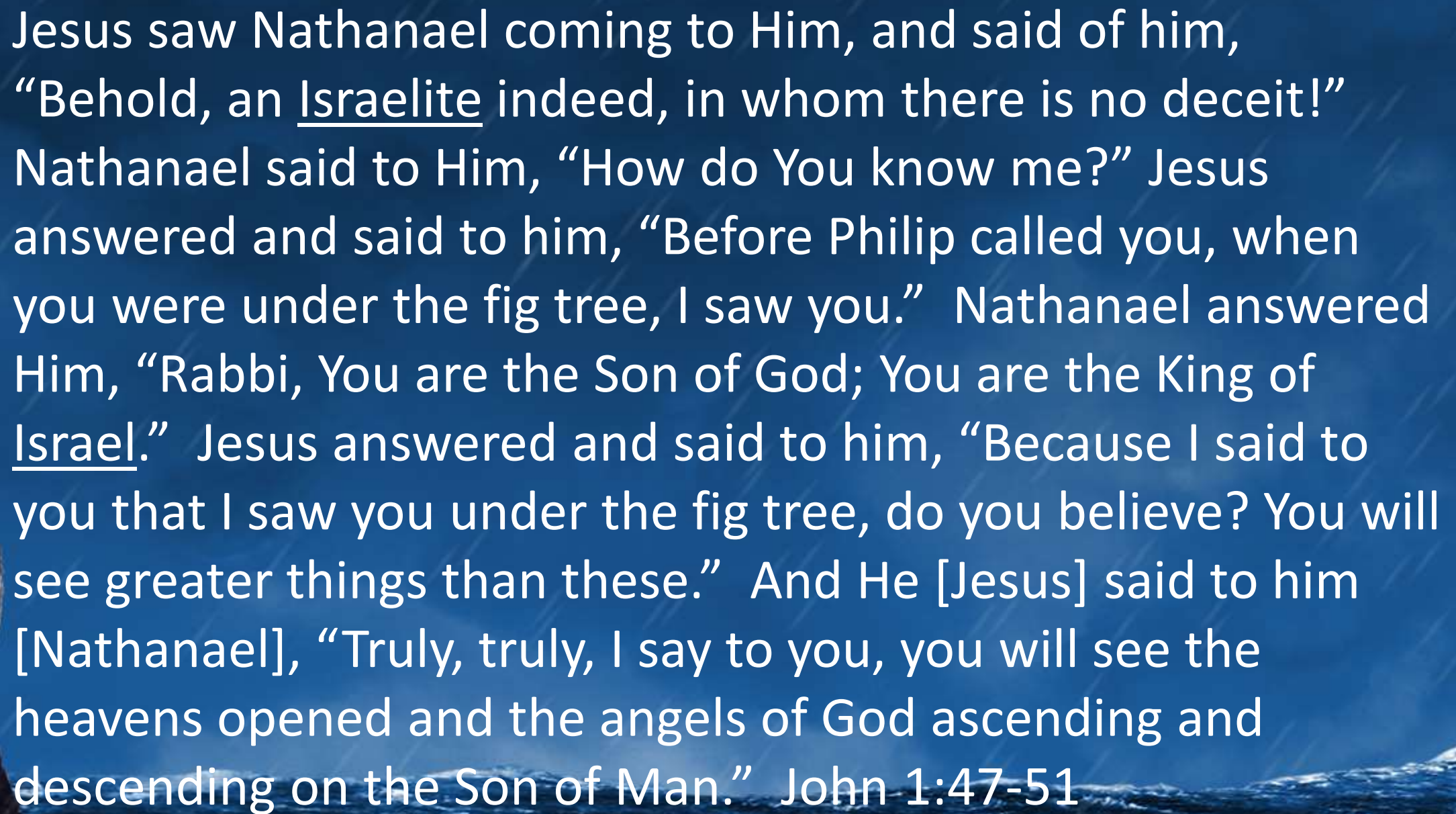


EPIC TALES

A photograph of a whale's tail fluke emerging from the blue ocean, set against a background of a blue sky with light rays. The whale's tail is dark and curved, with white foam at the base where it meets the water.


The next day He [Jesus] purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, “Follow Me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” John 1:43-46

EPIC TALES

A whale tail is seen breaching the surface of the ocean on the left side of the image. The background is a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And He [Jesus] said to him [Nathanael], “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” John 1:47-51

EPIC TALES



Jacob's ladder is not a what; but a who. In the gospel of John, Jesus is the ladder to heaven. In Genesis 28, God was at the top and Jacob was at the bottom. In John chapter 1, Jesus the Son of God is at the bottom of the ladder. What does it mean? It means that in the person of Jesus, God has come down the ladder to join us on the earth.

If you want to go to heaven, Jesus is the stairway, He is the ladder, that will take you from here to there. He came down from heaven to earth so that we might have a way to go from earth to heaven.

Source: Ray Pritchard

EPIC TALES