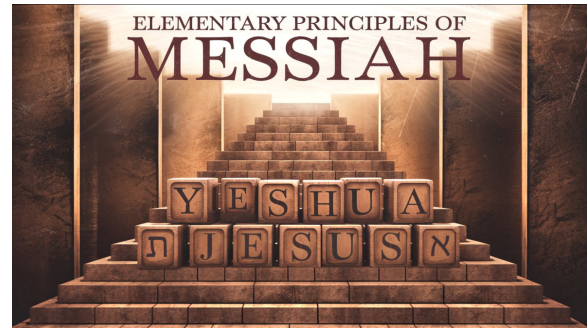


Elementary Principles of Messiah, Part 9
Baptism, Part C
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{Title slide} Shabbat shalom, brothers and sisters. Last week we continued “the doctrine of baptisms” segment in our “Elementary Principles of Messiah” series. I showed you Scripturally that baptism is commanded by God and that it is an urgent act that we ought to engage in as new believers after careful consideration of its meaning and after counting the cost of truly becoming a disciple of Yeshua. Upon baptism, we set aside everything that we were before we came to know the LORD, leaving our old self dead in the waters, and we rise up above the waters as a “new man” with a “new life” dedicated to following Messiah, which the LORD helps us do through the refining fire of His Holy Spirit. Disciples of Yeshua understand and live with the confidence that nothing is more valuable than an eternal relationship with God, and that relationship begins when we rise up from the waters. At the end of last week’s message I noted that we would be addressing a number of questions people have about baptisms and potentially wrapping up our discussion of this basic principle today, but there’s a fairly major topic we need to cover first before we can do that, and so we’re going to have to extend our study of baptisms into another week. When I think about my own baptism, which I shared with my wife Jen, who was also baptized that day—when I think about the time I first witnessed the baptism of a new disciple of Yeshua—and when I think about every baptism I’ve witnessed since—, I can tell you there has been one thing that overwhelms each experience: Before, during and after each baptism, there is palpable and powerful spiritual warfare taking place, and I want you to be aware of this reality, so that’s what we’re going to cover today. Baptism is not something to take lightly—it behooves us to bathe each baptism in prayer, to prepare each soul with fasting, and to encourage serious contemplation both before and after the moment of decision. Born again followers of Yeshua must understand they are entering a persecuted family and that life will never be the same after making a commitment to follow Him. Baptism is the beginning of our victory in Messiah Yeshua, but it is also the beginning of testing that will continue until the LORD decides to take us home.

{New slide} The Apostles Peter and Paul both wrote words of encouragement to new disciples, but they doubled as words of warning to set a realistic expectation of what comes next after joining the company of saints through repentance, faith, and baptism. Declaring alignment with God certainly brings joy and peace to our souls, for our relationship with Yeshua and our obedience to His Word through the Holy Spirit has no equal in this life. A new, authentic relationship with God through Messiah will absolutely free us from bondage to sin and death and set us apart in victory from the rest of the world. But be advised: Our victory in Yeshua is going to attract the attention of the enemy who does not want to let any of his captives go free. We have to endure in our faith through the testing that is going to come our way, largely on account of spiritual forces that are going to try to bring us back into captivity. In 1st Peter 4, verses 12-13, we read: “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Messiah’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.” Again, baptism begins what is often a long road of sanctification that may ultimately lead to glorification in the Kingdom of God, if we remain faithful. The suffering that we will face in our walk can certainly cause some to fall away. Paul wrote similarly in 2nd Timothy 3, verse 12: “...all who desire to live godly in Messiah Yeshua will suffer persecution,...” That’s “ALL,” not some. Peter and Paul weren’t making this up, and nor were they talking only of their own experience in the faith; both men had learned from their Master who taught this very same thing. Yeshua said in John 16:33, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” This isn’t a maybe; in fact, anyone who is truly following Yeshua is going to face persecution and tribulation—it is a given. Yeshua also said in Matthew 10:22: “you will be hated by all for My name’s sake”—that is, hated by all who oppose Yeshua—hated by all who do not worship Yeshua for the victory He has won for us by His blood, for as we read in Leviticus 17:11: “it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.” As He continues, though, Yeshua adds this incredibly important point: “But he who endures to the end will be saved.” When we are baptized in the name of Yeshua we begin a long journey as part of a persecuted family, and when we endure in our faith until the end of our lives in this world, we will join the LORD in His Kingdom forever.

{New slide} We should rest assured in our faith as part of our effort to endure in the trials of this world with the Holy Spirit, daily renewing the spirit of our minds by taking every thought captive, for Yeshua also declared in the greatest sermon of all time: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,... Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My

sake.” To the person of tepid faith, these may be hard words to hear—they may even cause many to stumble, but to the one who has counted the cost of discipleship and has made the decision to wholly follow Yeshua, these words bring confidence. Those who are persecuted will inherit “the kingdom of heaven,” Yeshua said in Matthew 5. For those with faith, this is good news—both the persecution and the eternal reward. As the LORD continued in verses 10-12, He reiterated His promise, and this helps us to endure suffering in this life. In persecution, Yeshua exhorted: “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” If we are persecuted for following Yeshua after our conversion into the faith through the waters of baptism, then we will stand beside the prophets of God in His Kingdom, worshipping our glorified King together with them! This is something we have to grasp, for after our baptism and understanding of the Elementary Principles of Messiah, it is our duty to go forth and multiply disciples for the LORD, baptizing them also in Yeshua’s name and teaching them His commandments, just like He instructed. Those without faith are not going to take kindly to these sayings, but those with true faith who desire to follow our risen LORD forever gain confidence by them. When we know Messiah Yeshua, we are no longer of this world, even though we may remain in it. John recorded a similar sentiment from the LORD in John 15, verses 18-20, where we read: “‘If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his Master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My Word, they will keep yours also.’” I want you to understand that you are being baptized into the persecuted family of God—things don’t get easier once you’ve gone under the waters; actually, they become more challenging. The people you used to hang out with won’t want to hang out with you anymore. You increasingly will not want to do the worldly things that used to occupy your time. The people who hate God will go out of their way to insult you. This is the best-case scenario, but even in this there is joy! With each new challenge that we embrace with full faith and trust in the LORD, we grow closer to Yeshua and experience even more confidence in our relationship—He is a faithful God, the God who created the Heavens and the Earth and everything in them, and He has invited us to dwell with Him forever. What mysteries await us in eternity? Don’t you want to find out?

{New slide} As we come to terms with the reality of our faith—that it is not of this world but of God’s Kingdom to come in Spirit and in Truth—it’s also important for us to understand the spiritual reality of what is actually coming up against us as faithful

followers of Yeshua in this world. Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12, "...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." The people we encounter in this life who come up against us are not our enemy; they are the victim of our enemy—they are still in bondage to the devil, serving him in all of his ways. While we certainly are seeking those already walking in faith—to encourage them and exhort them in the Way of Yeshua, and this is part of today's message—we're also seeking others who do not currently serve the LORD; those who are serving the evil one. The LORD has sent us to set the captives free through faith in His name, first by sanctifying Yeshua in our hearts and adopting the Way He showed us, and secondly by being forever ready to give a humble defense to anyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that we have in our service to God (1 Peter 3:15). Yeshua, not speaking of our spiritual enemies, but speaking about those human agents still being held captive by the evil one, taught us in Matthew 5:45: "... love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." The LORD desires to use His faithful servants freed through the waters of baptism to free others who are still in bondage, and we can only do that through the elementary principles of the faith we're discussing. While we know that the LORD is victorious and will ultimately be victorious in the battle between good and evil, each and every soul is on the table, whether already committed to God or not. The enemy, though defeated, wants to take as many souls with him into his destruction as he can. He comes to kill, steal and destroy (John 10:10), and this is why Peter warned us in his first epistle, chapter 5, verse 8: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

{Pause, New slide} I want to show you some Scriptural examples that illustrate the spiritual warfare we will face surrounding baptism, both before and afterward—again, so you can prepare your hearts. When we celebrate Passover, we remember the freedom from bondage that Israel received through the blood of the lamb spread on their doorposts as well as the freedom from bondage that sinners receive through the blood of Yeshua. Accepting the blood for atonement inaugurates a covenant relationship with God in both cases, and in both cases baptism follows. In both cases, the blood frees us from bondage, but as Yeshua said, "You will be hated by all for My name's sake, but he who endures to the end will be saved." Paul explains the historical allegory of the wilderness experience in 1st Corinthians 10:1-6, where we read: "... I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed

through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Messiah. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.” I want you to think about the allegory this way: When Israel spread the blood of the lamb on their doorposts, the firstborn among them were redeemed by God and the unbelievers of Egypt lost their firstborn. The first nine plagues God brought against Egypt did not free Israel—only the blood of the lamb brought freedom. This was the event that caused their release; their faith in God’s Word helped to set them free. It was also the event that caused Egypt’s destruction. Indeed, the Egyptians’ lack of faith in God’s Word led to the weeping and gnashing of teeth. One week later, when Israel was at the sea, everyone went through it—the children of Israel as well as the whole Egyptian army, but only Israel came up out of the waters alive on the other side. The enemy pursued Israel into the waters of baptism, but they lacked the salvational faith that made baptism salvational. Likewise, we ought to be aware that the devil will pursue new believers into their baptism, attempting to pull them back into bondage, but God will deliver His faithful to the other side as a new creation, as a people set apart for Him. All of the bondage that held them back will be washed away in the waters in the same way that Pharaoh’s army was washed away.

{New slide} Consider these verses from the historical allegory in Exodus to further understand what Paul was getting at in 1st Corinthians 10. Remember from Exodus, Pharaoh had instructed Israel to depart from Egypt following the 10th plague—the blood of the lamb that saved Israel and condemned Egypt—but later he regretted allowing his slaves to leave and he pursued them to the edge of the sea. In Exodus 14:10, we read, “And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD.” I want you to understand that this very same thing happens when we confess Yeshua. Consider Yeshua’s parable of the sower from Matthew 13 as a parallel. Some souls are frightened by the threats of the enemy, others are enticed by the world, and some simply lack the faith to make it, but those who have developed true faith in Yeshua are ready to multiply themselves for the good of God’s kingdom and move across impossible barriers. But everything is possible with God! Be aware, though: As you begin to follow Yeshua and trust in His blood, the devil is going to try every trick in his book to try and convince you that your faith is not worth it. For some new believers, this will work and they will fall away. What will it take to preserve faith that leads into the waters of baptism? According to the Exodus example,

it takes a leader of strong faith, willing to stand in the gap and encourage new believers to wash away their past so they can move into new life in covenant with God Most High. Moses was such a leader for the Nation of Israel in the wilderness. In Exodus 14:13-14, “Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.’” When we trust in the LORD, He will fight our spiritual battles for us; He will keep the enemy at bay. This is why it’s imperative that we cry out to the LORD in prayer, with fasting, relying on that spiritual bread and spiritual drink that we have through faith in Messiah Yeshua. If you have not yet been baptized, allow me to encourage you as a simple pastor serving the LORD in this small community. The time is now—do not delay to get into the waters—but make sure you know what you’re up against—make sure you know what you’re getting into. Make sure you truly trust in Yeshua, for without faith in the One True God, getting into the water will be a glorified bath, and the enemy will continue to conquer.

{New slide} In Israel’s case, the LORD indeed fought in the spiritual realm against the demonic forces represented by Pharaoh and his army in Egypt. The Angel of God—a pre-incarnate Yeshua—stood in the gap between Israel and Egypt and blocked the enemy from pursuing God’s faithful people. The pillar of cloud—representing the Holy Spirit—also stood with the Angel. We read in Exodus 14:20: “Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.” For God’s people, the salvation of Yeshua by His Spirit brings light in the midst of darkness, victory in the midst of spiritual persecution and tribulation, and the LORD will give His enemies the very darkness in which they dwell, magnifying it so that it becomes all consuming. This is what happened leading up to the people’s baptism in the sea. Next, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD parted the sea, dividing the waters. With a faithful leader, the children of God can enter the waters with purpose. As we read in Exodus 14:22, the baptism came next: “The Israelites went through the sea on dry ground with a wall of water on their right and on their left.” They were fully immersed in the Sea of Reeds, and their immersion separated them from bondage to Egypt forever. Though the army of Egypt pursued Israel into the sea, “the waters flowed back and covered ... the entire army of Pharaoh. Not one of them survived” (Exodus 14:28b). Likewise, the devil and his minions will try to prevent believers in Yeshua from entering the waters of baptism—from crossing over from death to life—but with faithful trust all the way through to the end, with a humble and contrite heart, each new believer will emerge from the water victorious and the enemy will be washed away. The LORD will wash away all of our

former bondage to sin and death in the waters and give us a new life and a new hope in Him. We can see the same result for Israel in Exodus 14:30-31, where we read: "... the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses." This is that point when we emerge from the waters into new life. The devil no longer has any claim on our former sins. Just as Moses said to Israel: "the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever," Yeshua said to you and me: the bondage to sin and death that you had in your flesh, you are no longer subject to it—now you can be led by the Spirit in the newness of life. When we come out of the water, we believe in the LORD through His Son Yeshua by fearing the LORD and keeping His commandments, just as Israel did that day.

{New slide} The celebration of Moses and all of Israel following their Sea of Reeds crossing reminds me of what Yeshua said in Luke 15:10; namely, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Consider the intense scene in the wilderness from this excerpt in Exodus 15:1-6, where we read: "I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. The LORD is a warrior; Yahweh is His name. Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea. The best of Pharaoh's officers are drowned in the Sea of Reeds. The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone. Your Right Hand, LORD, was majestic in power. Your Right Hand, LORD, shattered the enemy." This celebration is intense, and truly it ought to be. The people were free and there was no going back; this is the very same freedom we receive in the waters also. Indeed, through our faith in the Blood of Yeshua, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, our repentance, and our subsequent baptism, the LORD by His Right Hand frees us from bondage and casts all of our sins into the abyss. The enemy can no longer accuse us of these sins unless we let him, for our LORD has become our salvation and He is worthy of all praise! It doesn't matter what power or principality pursues us into the waters, if our baptism is accomplished with authentic faith, when we rise up from the waters with Yeshua we begin our walk in Him and we leave all of our chains behind us. The Right Hand of God, a prophetic title for the Messiah, shatters the enemy; Yeshua is indeed majestic in power. He has finished the work of our redemption on the cross, and we are baptized into His work in the waters. The baptism itself is another salvation in Messiah Yeshua that frees us to pursue God, just as Paul wrote in Colossians 3:1: "If then you were raised with Messiah, seek those things which are above, where

Messiah is, sitting at the Right Hand of God.” From the time we come up born again, turning away from our old way and taking on our new way in Messiah, we are free to follow Yeshua all the way into the Promised Land.

{New slide} As you ought to know through study of Torah, only two men from the first generation that left Egypt and crossed the Sea of Reeds and heard the commandments of the covenant from Sinai, made it into the Promised Land. Only those who endure in faith until the end will be saved, and this historical allegory ought to be a warning for us. There’s far more depth to this allegory than I’m going to share today, but I want to remind you of what we covered earlier from 1st Corinthians 10, verse 2, where Paul wrote, “all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,” foreshadowing the baptism into Yeshua by water and by fire, but he concluded in verses 4-5: “with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.” Ultimately, their bodies were scattered because they did not believe God could take them into the Promised Land, but Joshua and Caleb believed. The people who had been freed by the blood of the lamb and baptized into a new life following after God in the wilderness didn’t just turn away from the faith; they complained against God in the midst of their many trials and tribulations that he took them through following their baptism and their hearts turned against Him. After getting a glimpse of the kingdom God promised to give them, according to Numbers 14:3-4, the people said in unison: “‘Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?’ So they said to one another, ‘Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.’” This is quite a departure from the celebration they enjoyed in their new faith on the banks of the Sea of Reeds. What happened to their trust in God and the Way He was taking them? God led Israel through a series of trials and tribulations after their baptism, and rather than appreciate what the LORD did to save them in each and every one of these situations where they were being sanctified, they chose to complain against the LORD. You see, after freeing us from bondage, the LORD tests us to see whether we will truly follow Him or whether we will return to our former way. These people desired to return to Egypt, to the bondage of their old life before they were saved, but it’s worse than this. When they said, “let us select a leader and return to Egypt” they were rejecting Moses, God’s appointed leader and the Angel that had led them all their way, and they were seeking a leader with a heart to serve Pharaoh in Egypt. They sought a false prophet, an antichrist if you will, to lead them back into bondage. They sought the meager pleasures of Egypt over the Promised Land they could not grasp because they had fallen away from their faith.

{New slide} When Paul explained that the LORD was not pleased with the children of Israel who had come out of Egypt, that is an understatement. In response to the people's rebellion, the LORD said in verse 29, "The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness. In Numbers 14:30-32, He added: "Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness." You see, Joshua and Caleb had faith; they believed the LORD would take them into the Promised Land. But the great majority of the people rejected God's promise because they desired the things of this world; they desired the pleasures of the flesh in the here and now. Heed Paul's warning: "We should not lust after evil things as they also lusted." We cannot desire our old life again after we have been baptized, lest we make our salvation null and void. The writer of Hebrews said it this way in chapter 6, verses 4-6: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame." But how does a saved people, fully protected and provided for by the LORD God who made the heavens and the earth, fully transformed into a new creation, being led by Yeshua and the Spirit along their way, fall into such a state of unbelief? There are too many examples to cite, so I'll just show you one. While Pharaoh represented the condemnation of sin and death that we were under before we turned to the LORD, and the Sea of Reeds crossing represents our baptism that separates us from that bondage, we can read through Torah and observe many evil forces pursuing Israel as they traveled through the wilderness. The spiritual hosts of wickedness are relentless, and they wear on God's people with one attack after another until fear, doubt, and discouragement creep in and destroy hope. These are the forces of evil that Paul warned us about when he said, "we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted."

{New slide} So the example I'm going to show you comes shortly after the people's baptism in the Sea of Reeds, and the purpose of this example is to illustrate how our own doubts make room for the enemy to come after us, even after we have committed ourselves to the LORD through baptism. Immediately after the Sea of Reeds crossing, we read in Exodus 15 how the people complained about the bitter waters of Marah, asking the LORD, "What shall we drink?" The LORD delivered the people again by

providing Moses with a tree that made the waters sweet, and then the LORD tested the people, instructing them to heed His voice and keep His commandments—a precursor to the covenant at Sinai. We can presume that the people began to obey the LORD, but then fell away again, for in Exodus 16, the congregation complained that they were running out of food and they longed for the meat available in Egypt. Hadn't the people seen enough from the LORD to trust in His provision? Apparently not. They desired to return to their bondage in Egypt just for a little meat. This reminds me of Esau, who sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of lentils. In other words, he sought the pleasures and fulfillments of this world instead of the joy of eternal life with God. Jacob desired what was better. In any case, in the wilderness, God delivered the people of Israel a second time by sending them Manna from Heaven. He also tested them by commanding them not to gather Manna on the Sabbath, a test several of them failed. At this time, the LORD was taking out only those individuals who sinned against Him, but things were about to escalate. In Exodus 17, the people contended with Moses again seemingly as a whole because they did not have water to drink, but they did more than this. They expressed doubt again about the LORD's purpose in bringing them out of bondage in Egypt. In verse 3, we read: "And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, 'Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?'" Moses, a faithful servant, went to the LORD and asked for His help, saying in verse 4, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!" The LORD, faithful and long-suffering with His people Israel, instructed Moses to strike the rock in Horeb so water would come out of it, and Moses did so. Following the provision from the LORD—living water from the Rock that was struck—"he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'" Clearly there are prophetic elements in God's response to each of these examples of Israel's contention, but that's not why I'm showing you these passages today. I want you to see the extent of Israel's doubt against the promises of God, even after they had been delivered through the blood of the lamb and the waters of the Sea of Reeds. We shouldn't be too hard on Israel, though. How many of us who follow Yeshua still wonder why the LORD tests us in our faith? Shouldn't we instead heed the teaching of the Apostle Peter, who said: "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Messiah's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." In trials and tribulations that follow our confession of faith and new life through baptism, we ought to rejoice rather than complain. This will ensure we do not "lust after evil things as they also lusted." I want

you to see what happened next, for it is clear that the LORD sent the sword of judgment against Israel in response to their doubt. The LORD brings judgment from time to time to see if His people would return to faith and trust in Him.

{New slide} In Exodus 17:8, we read: “Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim.” For historical context, understand that Amalek was the son of Eliphaz who was the son of Esau, and Amalek held on to his grandfather’s grudge against Israel. While Amalek had a bone to pick, it’s important to understand that there’s a greater spiritual context going on here. Because Israel was vacillating with their faith, the LORD allowed an enemy to come in and test them, and this is the same thing He will do with us, spiritually speaking. Now, it’s not necessary that we falter in our faith for the LORD to test us, but such weakness is often what brings about spiritual attacks in our lives. Consider the case of Simon Peter, one of Yeshua’s closest three disciples from Luke 22. Yeshua had just finished telling his disciples that they would sit on thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel in His Kingdom, and then He turned to Simon Peter and said in verse 32: “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.” In context, the Apostles had been disputing about which one of them was greatest. Yeshua’s response was to explain how one of His greatest disciples would fall away from Him, even denying that he knew Him. In this dialogue, notice how Yeshua in no way said He would prevent Satan from “sifting Peter,” but rather that He would allow this testing. At the same time, Yeshua said He would pray for Peter that He would endure the trial and return to lead others. This indeed is the purpose of such testing; to strengthen us when we are weak and to prepare us for the battles that are coming up next. The important thing is that we endure in our faith and turn to the LORD in prayer and praise through this hardship, which Israel would do in our Exodus 17 example. Going back to Amalek’s attack—a spiritual attack of the enemy against God’s anointed people—we read in verses 9-10a: “And Moses said to Joshua, ‘Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand.’ So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek.” This is all well and good. The people of God will certainly face spiritual forces of wickedness, but victory in these situations depends on something very particular, which the context illustrates. Continuing in verses 10-13, we read: “And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses’ hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were

steady until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.” Seeking the LORD in prayer is essential for all spiritual battles, and even physical battles. When we are not strong enough to engage in prayer on our own, we must depend on our brothers and sisters to hold up our hands of praise to the LORD. The LORD would come to help Israel, but only when the hearts of Israel were turned toward the LORD. Whenever Moses, the leader of the people, let down his guard, Israel suffered at the hands of the enemy. Whenever Moses, helped by His fellow elders, endured in his relationship with the LORD, all of the people were victorious. All that being said, the bottom line for our purposes today is this: The enemy is not just going to try and prevent us from deliverance in the waters of baptism, the enemy will also come after the fact to try to take us off course. The enemy will, in fact, keep coming after us and relentlessly to try and discourage us with fear and doubt. Our only path of victory is to endure in our faith until the end and rely on the LORD to fight these battles against our enemies. Rather than desire to return to our bondage in Egypt on account of fear or doubt, we ought to look forward to the Kingdom of God with all hope and trust in the promises of God, for He is faithful to deliver at His appointed time.

{New slide} There’s another aspect of Moses’s prayers, supported by Aaron and Hur, on the top of the hill at Rephidim that I want you to consider. If Moses held his hands up all day long, with the help of his two brothers, there is another activity that he likely wasn’t doing. While I can’t say for sure, the text implies that Moses, Aaron and Hur were not eating or drinking while they concentrated on their prayers for deliverance with repentant hearts for Israel. A passage from Joel 2, verses 11-13 comes to mind here that I want to read for you: Consider: “The LORD gives voice before His army, For His camp is very great; For strong is the One who executes His Word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; Who can endure it? ‘Now, therefore,’ says the LORD, ‘Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.’” If the LORD was judging Israel for turning away from Him, then Israel’s victory seems to come from the repentant prayers and fasting led by Moses, Aaron and Hur on the top of the hill. While these men were leading repentance through prayer and fasting following Israel’s baptism in the waters, this same practice can also take place prior to baptism to prepare our hearts for the conversion to come. Last week, we spoke about the Apostle Paul’s conversion and baptism. Perhaps it’s just coincidence, but we can see from the text that Paul fasted for three days leading up to his ultimate deliverance. After his experience with Yeshua on the Road to Damascus, we read in

Acts 9:9, “and He was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.” Directly following his baptism, we can also see in verse 19 that “he ... received food” and “was strengthened.” It may be happenstance, but the two Scriptures combined certainly support the idea of fasting leading into a baptismal conversion.

{New slide} When we add in additional context from the Didaché (<https://immanuelevangelicalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Didache.pdf>), an extra-canonical manual on Messianic doctrine from the late first or early second century, we find additional support for the idea that Paul’s example of fasting and baptism was carried forward into the second generation of believers. We read in Didaché 7:6-7: “Before the baptism, both the baptizer and the candidate for baptism, plus any others who can, should fast. The candidate should fast for one or two days beforehand.” You might ask, how is the idea of fasting surrounding baptism related to spiritual warfare, which has been the main focus of today’s message? I think the answer comes to light when we read God’s instructions to the prophet Isaiah concerning fasting. We read in Isaiah 58:6: “Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?” (Isaiah 58:6) What does it mean to “loose the bonds of wickedness” other than to sever our bondage to sin and death, which is the very purpose of baptism. What heavy burdens might we face other than those imposed by the enemies of God? Indeed, a fast according to the LORD is meant to free the oppressed from every yoke. While I can’t say fasting is Scripturally required leading up to baptism, it certainly does seem to be supported by the text as well as first and second century practices. Considering the power of fasting to help us deny the flesh and rely on “every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God” instead, I find it highly likely that the two practices ought to be linked. As we read earlier from Paul in Ephesians 6:12, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” And as we’ve covered in past sermons from Romans 6:4, we are “buried with [Yeshua] through baptism into death, [so] that just as [Messiah] was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in the newness of life.” The purpose of fasting before baptism is to bury any wickedness, any bondage, or any attachment we might still have to the world in the waters, so that when we come up from the below the surface we might follow Messiah in obedience to His Holy Word.

{New slide} There’s one more illustration I want to share with you concerning the connection between fasting and baptism, especially when it comes to spiritual warfare. In this example, fasting follows baptism, but it is just as meaningful in this reverse

order, if not more so. After all, Yeshua is our living example of how to resist the devil and follow the commandments of God. As we covered last week, in Matthew 3, Yeshua went to the Jordan River to be baptized by His cousin John, and when He came up from the water, “the Spirit of God descended like a dove and alighted upon Him” and God proclaimed from Heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Directly following this powerful display, we read in Matthew 4:1-2, “Then Yeshua was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry....” When it came to Yeshua’s ministry, His baptism came first, then His wandering through the wilderness without food or water, and finally his arrival in Galilee where He announced His identity as the Messiah by reading from the Scroll of Isaiah and began His ministry. Yeshua’s baptism and His lengthy period of fasting were important spiritual steps leading up to the launch of His ministry, when He would preach: “repent and hear the good news.” Because Yeshua came to provide an example for us, He also had to be tested, but unlike each of us and His people Israel who wandered in their own wilderness, Yeshua would pass every wilderness test without fail. As our High Priest who first came as a the Son of Man, but was then glorified upon His resurrection as the Son of God, Yeshua could sympathize with our weaknesses. While He was “in all points tempted as we are,” he was “without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). In this way, Yeshua’s wilderness experience demonstrated the successful power of prayer and fasting surrounding baptism in union with the Holy Spirit for the defeat of the spiritual hosts of wickedness. The devil attempted three separate attacks against the LORD, even using the Scriptures against Him, but the anointed King easily defeated the enemy by simply explaining the Truth of the Word.

{New slide} And so as we get into the testing Yeshua would face in the wilderness, we can see that the first attack of the enemy is aimed at the weakness of His flesh, an attack we too will face. In Matthew 4, verses 3-4, we read: “Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’ But He answered and said, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” Notice the enemy’s sleight of hand here, which is all framed around the word “if.” The first question to ponder in this battle is this: Why would the Son of God ever submit to the devil and cater to the needs of His own flesh? Why would we, who follow Him, ever do that either? The whole idea of Yeshua’s baptism and His subsequent fast was to subject His flesh to the Word of God, and it has the same purpose for you and me. Is the temptation ludicrous? Hardly. Satan’s temptation is craftier than it looks on the surface, and we ought to be mindful that the devil will come after us in similar fashion, but Yeshua's

response eliminates the threat, and we ought to learn from Him here. Just one chapter earlier, John the Baptist said to the Pharisees, “do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.” Through the faith of Abraham, recall, “all the nations of the world would be blessed.” But God, who created the heavens and earth and everything in them, does not need to rely on human reproduction to create children for Himself. In Genesis 2:7, “the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.” With all this being said, I want to explore the deeper meaning here.

{New slide} Yeshua is the Word of God who became flesh. The Word of God in the Old Covenant was written on two tablets of stone, but now in the incarnation of God Almighty, the Word of God had literally become Yeshua’s body. Is not Yeshua, then, Himself the bread that had come from stones? Why would He surrender to Satan’s command when He had already accomplished victory through His own power? Yeshua, being God in the flesh, had already turned stones into bread. Much later in His ministry, Yeshua compared His body sacrificed on the cross to the Bread of Life, which we ought to eat, meaning that we ought to incorporate our faith in His sacrifice as the Bread we need to live eternally in His Kingdom. It’s clear that Yeshua’s response to Satan is a victorious blow with “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,” as described in Ephesians 6:17. This sword He pulled out from its sheaf is from Deuteronomy 8:3, deep in the Torah, where we read: “And God humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” In yet another powerful reference, Yeshua also explained that He is the manna that fell from Heaven feeding the Israelites in the wilderness when they were hungry, and when they complained about not having any food. He is the Bread of life, the very embodiment of “every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God,” and here in the wilderness Himself, He pulled from Torah to completely annihilate the devil’s temptation on a deep spiritual level empowered by both His baptism and His fasting, but also derived from His identity as God in the flesh. As followers, we too must have such identity in Yeshua before anything we do in faith has any power.

{New slide} In a second temptation, the devil took Yeshua to the pinnacle of the temple, saying to the LORD, “If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” As we come into our faith, it’s

important to recognize that we will face many false interpretations of the Word, or even false applications of the Word, and we need to be prepared to go to battle and stand with discernment on what is True. The Adversary had taken the text for his temptation directly from Psalm 91, verses 11-12, where God's Word reads: "For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. They will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Once again, the devil is using the preposition "if" to cast doubt on the truth that Yeshua IS the Son of God, but the Truth isn't an "if." Indeed, God will command His angels concerning "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High." The Psalm is not ambiguous; it's referring directly to Messiah Yeshua. In this temptation, we can identify one of the greatest spiritual threats we face from the devil. Satan was speaking 100 percent truth to the LORD, quoting Scripture verbatim, but he was twisting it for his own purposes by attempting to throw Yeshua off using the time-tested faith killer: pride. What's more, Satan showed Yeshua the pinnacle of the Temple, the very place where the glory of the LORD had departed from; the very place where the Messiah was prophesied to appear. What better way to show all of the Jews that their Messiah had come than to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple and live? This was the Messiah the Jews were expecting. But this was not God's plan, and Satan was not in charge of Yeshua's life—neither can he be in charge of ours. We must leave the waters of baptism humbly following Yeshua, subjecting our lives to Him alone.

{New slide} Yeshua responded to the devil using the first few words from Deuteronomy 6:16-19, where we read: "You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted Him in Massah. You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the LORD swore to your fathers, to cast out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has spoken." The Hebrew word "Massah" literally means "testing," and the reference is to Exodus 17, which we read earlier. Israel as a nation put God to the test by the waters of Meribah, which means "quarreling," bemoaning that they had left their home in Egypt where they were still in bondage to sin and death. The LORD's response to Satan and any he has recaptured here is simple. Yeshua was saying: I am God in the flesh and you, devil, cannot lead me into iniquity. The LORD is Holy, and He shall be regarded as Holy by all of His creation. We too must be careful to stand on this acknowledgement that Yeshua is One in being with the Father and not let the devil take this truth away from us. In fact, confession that Yeshua is God is a requirement for baptism into His name, which is a point we will cover in more detail next week. It's related to our whole discussion. The

spiritual battle is real, before and after our confession of faith and our immersion into the waters of repentance. We have to make sure we are baptized into Yeshua's baptism, for no other baptism will be sufficient.

{New slide} In his final deception, the enemy took Yeshua to the highest mountain, conceivably the very mountain on which God's throne sits overlooking all creation, seeking to overthrow the Son of God. The devil said to the LORD, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." It's important for us to recognize that worship is what the enemy seeks from each of us. He will use whatever means he possibly can to tear us away from obedience to God and our testimony that Yeshua is God who saved us by coming in the flesh. We cannot let the devil deceive us in this way. On this point, we must remain steadfast in the faith we have been baptized into. Ultimately, the devil is a usurper. Satan could not give to God "all the kingdoms of the world," because ultimately all creation already belongs to God. The devil attempted to stand before the Son of God and declare himself king, but Yeshua defeated Him with one more swing of the sword, saying in Matthew 4:10: "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" Here the LORD referenced Deuteronomy 6, where we read the greatest commandment ever given by God to man: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." Just a few verses down the page, we read in verses 13-15, "You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you (for the LORD your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the LORD your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth." This was a powerful rebuke rooted in prophesy, for Satan truly believed himself to be a god who could stand up against the Most High, but he is a created being, and one who fell out of Heaven. Ultimately, Yeshua will be the one who destroys Him. What's most amusing to me is the final phrase in this section. We read: "Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him." This perhaps is the most important lesson of them all. The devil had attempted to convince Yeshua to worship him by citing Psalm 91, but Yeshua directed all worship to the One True God. After his baptism and his 40 days of fasting and his victory over the spiritual battles that directly followed, the angels came to guard Him, and to lift Him up, so He would not strike His foot against a stone. The written Word can certainly be used by the enemy to deceive God's people, but the living Word directed by the Holy Spirit of God cannot be defeated. Don't let the devil tell you that you can be "like God" if you turn away from God and worship the evil one instead. The LORD has already called us into relationship with Him, and He will care for us forever

when we put Him first in our lives. We can expect spiritual battles from the enemy like this before and after our baptism into the faith, but if we remain steadfast in our faith, we will stand victorious with Yeshua. Next week, God willing, we will get into the apologetics I've been teasing for the last two weeks. Shabbat shalom.