Go Up and Take Possession of It

Deuteronomy 1:1-46

Key Verse: 1:21 “See, the Lord your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

 Deuteronomy is the fifth book of Pentateuch, which means ‘the five books of Moses’. The word “Deuteronomy” means “the second law” or “repetition of the law.” The law was the Ten Commandments and other laws given at Mount Sinai and recorded in Exodus 20-24, Leviticus, and Numbers, which were given to the Israelites through Moses while they were staying in the desert. God gave the copy of these laws to the next generation of the Israelites through Moses while they were in the wilderness east of the Jordan (1,5). It was the first day of the eleventh month, exactly forty years after the Israelites had left Egypt (3,4)

First, the faithful God and mindful God (5-18) Moses began to expound this law saying, “***The Lord our God said to us at Horeb, “You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites; go to all the neighboring peoples in the Arabah, in the mountains, in the western foothills, in the Negev and along the coast, to the land of the Canaanite and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the Euphrates. See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land the Lord swore he would give to your fathers- to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob-and to their descendants after them.***” (5,6) The Israelites were on the way to the promised land after they had come out of Egypt with God’s mighty power. On the way those who had complained and sinned against God died without even seeing the promised land. Now their children were about to enter the promised land which God had promised to give to their forefathers such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God told them to go in and take possession of the land.

 Here we learn the faithfulness of God. Our God is faithful and keeps his promise. People are forgetful and unfaithful. Some do not remember what they promised a few days ago. But our God is so faithful that he remembered what he had promised five hundred years ago with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As he had promised, God delivered the Israelites from Egypt, fed them for forty years in the desert, and guided them to the promised land. In Isaiah 49:15 the Lord says, “*Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you*.” I praise this faithful God. This faithful and loving God, who promised us salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, will keep his promise. I give thanks to God, who promised to lead us into the kingdom of God, who will be with us and guide us until we enter into our promised land, the kingdom of God. Amen!

 In verses 9-18 Moses asked the Israelites to choose leaders among them and appoint them as their judge so that Moses could share his burden with them together. Look at verses 9-13. “***At that time I said to you, “You are too heavy a burden for me to carry alone. The Lord your God has increased your numbers so that today you are as numerous as the stars in the sky. May the Lord, the God of your ancestors, increase you a thousand times and bless you as he has promised! But how can I bear your problems and your burdens and your disputes all by myself? Choose some wise, understanding and respected men from each of your tribes, and I will set them over you***.” In the past Moses had governed the whole Israelites and handled all disputes among them by himself. In Exodus 18 God sent Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, to Moses so that Moses could choose leaders among the people as their judge. Jethro said to Moses at that time, “What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.” Then Jethro advised Moses to select capable men from all the people-men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain-and appoint them as judges over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. (Ex 18:17-23) So, people brought every difficult case to Moses and the simple cases to the appointed judges. Moses was a humble man. He humbly accepted Jethro’s advice and did everything he had said. Through this event God taught Moses how to depend on God and to work together with others. A leader cannot handle all problems. He should work together with God and with his people. Our God is so mindful that he sent Jethro to Moses so that Moses could serve the Lord and shepherd his people more effectively. Yesterday God sent several women of prayer from Chicago UBF in order to encourage and pray for Missionary Mary Choi. They earnestly prayed for her and encouraged her with many good things. They advised her to depend on God in all things, who takes care of his sheep and his ministry. Our God is like a tender mother, who takes care of her children compassionately. Let us praise and give thanks to this mindful and compassionate God.

Second, go up and take possession of it (19-46) As God had commanded them, the Israelites set out from Horeb and went toward the hill country of the Amorites through all the vast and dreadful wilderness. Finally, they arrived at Kadesh Barnea. Kadesh Barnea is an important site in Israel’s history. Kadesh Barnea is an oasis area located in the desert of Zin, the southern part of Israel. At Kadesh, Hagar found water when she fled from Sarai, her mistress (Ge 16:14) At Kadesh Miriam and Aron rebelled against Moses, and at Kadesh she was buried. At Kadesh the Israelites stayed after their long journey from Horeb. Above all, at Kadesh Moses commanded the Israelites to go and take possession of the promised land. Look at verse 21. “***See, the Lord your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged***.” Moses reminded them that God had already given them the land. What they had to do was to go up and take possession of it. It was like God prepared a dinner table and sent them to go and eat. Moses encouraged them to overcome fear. “*Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.*” They didn’t have to fear because God would be with them. They were not alone when they conquered the land. God would be with them. God would fight for them.

 How did the Israelites respond to Moses’ command? In verse 22 all of the Israelites came to Moses and asked him to send spies to explore the land. This idea seemed good to Moses, so he selected twelve men from each tribe, and sent them to spy out the land. (23) Sending spies to the land seemed to be a good idea to Moses, but in fact it was the act of unbelief. The Israelites had to trust in God and go up to the land by faith. What they really needed is not checking the land, but trusting and obeying God’s command. Receiving God’s blessing should not depend on human situations or condition, but on our obedience to God’s word.

 In the initial stage of UBF ministry our ancestors of faith simply trusted in God and obeyed Jesus’ world mission command. They didn’t calculate based on their human situations or condition. They obeyed and went out by simply trusting in God. When God’s servant suggested a prayer topic for sending missionaries to Russia, they simply trusted and prayed even though it was impossible for us to send missionaries to Russia at that time. But they didn’t calculate. They prayed and obeyed. Then God opened the door of Russia and sent the first missionary to Russia in 1990. When they simply trusted and obeyed, God opened the door of each country and each continent until God sent more than 2,000 missionaries to more than 90 countries for the last few decades. Calculation is an act of unbelief. God does not work with those who calculate. God works with those who simply trust in him and obey his word. God’s power and his work cannot be hindered by human conditions and calculation.

 What was the report of the spies? The twelve spies came back with some fruits of the land. And they reported, “It is a good land that the Lord our God is giving us.” (25) They continued in Numbers 13:28,29 saying, “But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there….” Here the descendants of Anak were giant. But Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, silenced the people and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.” (Nu 13:30) But the ten spies, except Caleb and Joshua, discouraged their people saying, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are…All the people we saw there are of great size…We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes…” (Nu 13:31-33) They spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. (Nu 13:32)

 How did the Israelites respond when they heard the spies’ report? According to Numbers 14, that night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aron. They complained to God saying, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in the wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? … Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt? ...” (Nu 14:1-4) Moses repeated this story for their children in verses 26-28.

What was Moses’ response to these unbelieving and terrifying people? Look at verse 29-31. “***Then I said to you, “Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the wilderness. There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place***.” Moses encouraged them to have faith in God. He told them not to be terrified or be afraid because God will go ahead of them and fight for them. What they should do was to remember what God had done for them for the last forty years in Egypt and in the wilderness. Moses asked them to remember God’s history in their lives. Remembering God’s history in our lives, what God has done for us in our lives, is very important in our spiritual life. Our God has been so faithful and merciful that we could live thus far without any special difficulties and dangers. In fact, God delivered each of us from out of slavery of sin and brought us to the land of blessing, the land of truth, the land of salvation through Jesus Christ. God has provided us daily bread at proper times and led us to this mission field so that we could participate in world mission. We must remember God’s history in our lives. We must remember how God loves us, saves us, and helps us in all aspects of our lives. We must live by faith. By faith we must go up and take possession of the promised land. By faith we must overcome the world. Where is your promised land? Let us overcome fear, and fight a good fight for God’s name sake and for his kingdom. The Lord our God, who is going before us, will fight for us. Amen!

Moses’ rebuke for his people’s unbelief and its consequences of their unbelief are written in verses 32-46. The Lord God went ahead of them on their journey, guided them in fire by night and in a cloud by day, searched out the places for them to camp, and showed the way they had to go. In spite of this, they did not trust in the Lord God. God was angry with their unbelief and solemnly swore: “No one from this evil generation shall see the good land I swore to give you your ancestors, except Caleb son of Jephunneh. He will see it, and I will give him and his descendants the land he set his feet on, because he followed the Lord wholeheartedly.” (34-36) God promised that those who didn’t trust in the Lord and rebelled against him would never enter into the promised land. In fact, all those who didn’t trust in God but complained, died in the desert without seeing the land. We have the right of choice. America is the land of freedom. But the consequence between our belief and unbelief is fatal. Believing in God or not is a choice between life and death.

Deuteronomy, especially in chapter 28, repeatedly teaches us about the consequences of the Israelite’ choice between obedience and disobedience, between blessing and curse. When they trusted in God and obeyed his words, blessings followed them. When they rebelled against God and became disobedient, they lost in battle. (41-46)

Today we learned that our God is a faithful God and mindful God. He takes care of us as a father carries his son. He will go ahead of us and fight for us. We don’t have to be afraid. We don’t have to be discouraged. Trust and obey! Let us go up our promised land and take possession of it by faith. Victory is ours! Amen.