

When you enter the land - Understanding the full context leads to better understanding

I have often heard the phrase “When you enter the land” mentioned in discussions on the applicability to a specific commandment. I [have previously spoken about](#) our logic getting in the way of our obedience. Could the use of this condition be another example of us trying to reason which of the instructions of YHVH to obey? A good example of this is the sabbatical year. Should we or shouldn't we keep the instructions regarding the sabbatical year? Is it only applicable to people living in Israel or is it applicable to all? Let us do a detailed study of this phrase and see what conclusions we can make and how that needs to be applied in our lives today.



The giving of the commandments

In order to understand the phase we need to make sure that we take into account the history of the nation of Israel when the instructions were given to them via Moses. Allow me to provide a short recap of the key events:

1. Exodus – The nation of Israel are slaves to the Egyptians in the land of Egypt. While in Egypt they are forced to follow the laws of the Pharaoh and they do not possess any land. YHVH sends Moses to lead them out of bondage and return them to the land that was promised to Abraham. During this process of the exodus they become YHVH's people and He gives them the feast of Pesach as a reminder of this turning point.
2. Sin in the Desert – Israel is now turned into a free nation that is given the choice of who they will obey. Shortly after the victory over the Egyptians, the nation faces a problem with their water supply and YHVH provides for them via a miracle. It is during this time that they receive their first ordinances.

Exodus 15:24–26

²⁴ So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” ²⁵ Then he cried out to YHVH, and YHVH showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet.

There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. ²⁶ And He said, “If you will give earnest heed to the voice of YHVH your Elohim, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, YHVH, am your healer.”

Shortly after this, they run out of food and YHVH again provides for them via the manna and quails (Exodus 16:1-20). During this time the instructions of the Sabbath is also explained to them and they experience first-hand what the effect of disobedience is. They are told that the seventh day rest will be a test to them.

Exodus 16:4-5

⁴ Then YHVH said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, *that I may test them*, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. ⁵ "On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily."

At the mount Sinai the people of Israel choose to obey YHVH. At Mount Sinai YHVH gives to them His law and ordinances, including personal injury laws, property laws, sabbatical year and the tabernacle and priesthood.

Exodus 19:8

⁸ All the people answered together and said, "All that YHVH has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the words of the people to YHVH.

However, before Moses returns with the law, the people have already rebelled against YHVH and built the golden calf. After Moses intercedes for them, they are saved. When they reach the promised land, the incident with the 12 spies happen and they end up wandering for 40 years before entering the land due to their unbelief.

3. Entering the land – Once they cross the Jordan river, they take possession of the land and are commanded to drive out the inhabitants of the land. The land is divided among the tribes (Joshua 13) and now they are a free nation that own their own property. They also now need to provide for their own food, shelter and safety. Joshua is given the instructions regarding the six cities of refuge from YHVH.

Joshua 20:1-3

¹ Then YHVH spoke to Joshua, saying, ² "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'Designate the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, ³ that the manslayer who kills any person unintentionally, without premeditation, may flee there, and they shall become your refuge from the avenger of blood.

After settling in the land, YHVH gives them rest from their enemies and after an address from Joshua, the nation again confirms that they will serve YHVH (Joshua 24:14-28).

4. Sin and Exile – However, the nation do not keep His commandments and soon they need to be rescued by the Judges. The cycle of sin, repentance, salvation and peace repeats itself a couple of times. Eventually the nation chooses to have a king rule over them. After three kings, this leads to a split of the nation. This setup eventually leads them to idolatry and due to the fact that they sin (including not keeping His sabbatical years) they end up in exile and the land receives it's rest.

5. Return to the land – They return to the land of YHVH, but not as a free nation. They are a vessel nation that is ruled over by many different nations. However, in the period they again discover the book of the law and choose to implement the laws of YHVH including the feasts.

Ezekiel 20

Why is all of this important? When the elders of the nation in exile come to inquire of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 20), YHVH tells Ezekiel not to answer them. In the explanation to them YHVH recounts this history to them. He explains that He had given His statutes and ordinances to them on several occasions.

- Sojourn in Egypt (Ezekiel 20:5-10)
- First period in the wilderness (Ezekiel 20:11-17)
- Second period in the wilderness (Ezekiel 20:18-26)
- Settlement in the land (Ezekiel 20:27-29)
- Exilic period and future (Ezekiel 20:30-44)

Here we have confirmation from YHVH that He gave them His ordinance more than once:

Ezekiel 20:11–12

¹¹ “I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live. ¹² “Also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am YHVH who sanctifies them.

Ezekiel 20:19–20

¹⁹ “I am YHVH your Elohim; walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and observe them. ²⁰ ‘Sanctify My sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am YHVH your Elohim.’

Why did He have to do this? Due to the fact that the fathers did not teach their children His statutes. Thus YHVH taught them the statutes again.

Ezekiel 20:18

¹⁸ “I said to their children in the wilderness, ‘Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers or keep their ordinances or defile yourselves with their idols.

For me this portion in Ezekiel is the key to understanding why certain laws are repeated in the books of Moses. What did Moses say, why did he explain these commandments to the nation during the second period in the wilderness as described by Ezekiel?

Deuteronomy 4:5

⁵ “See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as YHVH my Elohim commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it.

“When you enter the land ...”

The first use of the phrase is actually given before the start of the exodus. It is then used in reference to the feast of Pesach.

Exodus 12:25–27

²⁵ “**When you enter the land** which YHVH will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. ²⁶ “And when your children say to you, ‘What does this rite mean to you?’ ²⁷ you shall say, ‘It is

a Passover sacrifice to YHVH who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.' " And the people bowed low and worshiped.

Most occurrences of this phrase occur in the book of Leviticus to the first generation in the wilderness before the counting or the incident with the 12 spies. (Lev 14: 34 – 35, Lev 19:23 – 25, Lev 23:10, Lev 25:2) It also appears in Numbers (Numbers 15:2, Numbers 34:2) and Deuteronomy (Deut 18:9-11, Deut 26:1-2).

This phrase can be used in Scripture to denote two different things:

- What laws should you follow as a free nation that own your own land.
- Laws that YHVH felt He needed to repeat.

Let us now compare all the scripture for the commandments that are preceded with the phrase. Please find a summary in the following table.

Reference	Instruction	New	Landowner	Previous Reference
Exodus 12:25-27	When you enter the land which YHVH will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. And when your children say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to YHVH who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.' ”	Yes	No	
Leviticus 14: 34 - 35	When you enter the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession, and I put a mark of leprosy on a house in the land of your possession, then the one who owns the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, 'Something like a mark of leprosy has become visible to me in the house.	Yes	Yes	
Leviticus 19:23-25	When you enter the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to YHVH. In the fifth year you are to eat of its fruit, that its yield may increase for you; I am YHVH your Elohim.	Yes	Yes	
Leviticus 23:10	'When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest.	No	Yes	Exodus 23:16
Leviticus 25:2-7	When you come into the land which I shall give you, then the land shall have a sabbath to YHVH. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, but during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to YHVH; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard	No	Yes	Exodus 23:10

Numbers 15:2	When you enter the land where you are to live, which I am giving you, then make an offering by fire to YHVH, a burnt offering or a sacrifice to fulfill a special vow, or as a freewill offering or in your appointed times, to make a soothing aroma to YHVH, from the herd or from the flock	No	No	Leviticus 1:2
Numbers 15:18-19	“Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘ When you enter the land where I bring you, then it shall be, that when you eat of the food of the land, you shall lift up an offering to YHVH.	No	Yes	Leviticus 2:1
Numbers 34:2	Command the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘ When you enter the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance, even the land of Canaan according to its borders.	Yes	Yes	
Deuteronomy 17:14-17	When you enter the land which YHVH your Elohim gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom YHVH your Elohim chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. “Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since YHVH has said to you, ‘You shall never again return that way.’	Yes	Yes	
Deuteronomy 18:9-11	When you enter the land which YHVH your Elohim gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations.	No	No	Deuteronomy 12:29-31
Deuteronomy 26:1-2	Then it shall be, when you enter the land which YHVH your Elohim gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground which you bring in from your land that the YHVH your Elohim gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place where YHVH your Elohim chooses to establish His name.	No	Yes	Deuteronomy 16:10

Based on these facts, what are the logical conclusions that we can make?

- It is not always new commandments that are given after the phrase
- Not all commandments given after the phrase has any relevance on land or property ownership (Pesach celebration and making the offer)
- More than half the commandments that contain the phrase had been given earlier without the phrase

Thus the conclusion must simply be that the commandments following this phrase could have wider application than simply when you live in the land of Israel. Turning the argument the other way, are all the commandments that require land ownership preceded with this phrase? No, some verses regarding planting, sowing and harvesting does not have any reference to this phrase:

Leviticus 19:9–10

⁹ *'Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ 'Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the YHVH your Elohim.*

Leviticus 19:19

¹⁹ *'You are to keep My statutes. You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together.*

Are we to keep these instructions?

John 14:15

¹⁵ *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*

Every single instruction in the Torah was given to Israel - a free nation - for when they are in the land. All Torah is given as instructions in righteousness. Some instructions can be followed more easily than others. We even have some instruction that we cannot follow at all at the moment. For example, instructions pertaining to the Temple and Levitical priesthood are not applicable at the moment, because there is no Temple.

We should do as we are able and as best we can. This simply means that we must do all that is physically possible for us to do. Can you celebrate Sabbath anywhere? Yes of course. Should you go to Jerusalem for the three pilgrimage festivals? Yes. It is commanded. Is it possible for every believer to do so? No. Due to financial constraints it would not be possible for every believer, but that does not nullify the commandment.

YHVH knows our hearts and tests our hearts. He will know if it was physically possible for you to do but you willfully chose to disobey or make His commandments your second or third priority.

We should not try to reason the commandments away but rather to use this energy to find the best way for us to keep the commandments.. We should ask ourselves if we are able and if the answer is yes, then we should do it. If not, what can I do to get me closer to the place or position where I can? Maybe I cannot go for all three the feasts, but if I save my "holiday"(holy day – His Set Apart days) money, I can go once a year or once every second year. We can save money to go to nice warm and

sunny beach resorts (most likely not holy or set apart) but we reason that Israel during the feasts is just too expensive. This type of reasoning just highlights the true intention of our hearts.

Do I need to keep the sabbatical year? Yes, Exodus 23:10 and Leviticus 25:2 tells you that you should. It does not mean that it is easy to do it, but still you need to find the best way. You need to start to study and prepare. If you know what the commandments are, you can study ways to survive for a year without eating anything produced from the land. You may be surprised by the other interesting things you learn along the way. Just like we plan our week in such a way that we do not have to work or shop on Sabbath, so we can plan for 6 years that the land can rest for one year. It is all about my commitment and the intention of my heart. How much do you love YHVH? Remember John 14:15 does not refer to "some of My commandments".

Changing my attitude does not change the commandment but does get me closer to it.

It is really simple. If you are in any way able to do a commandment, you should. YHVH will know your heart and your effort or the lack thereof. Do not reason away YHVH's instructions. Do what it requires of you as best you possibly can!

Jeremiah 17:10

¹⁰ "I, YHVH, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.

1 John 5:3

³ For this is the love of YHVH, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

John 14:21

²¹ "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

1 John 2:3

³ By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.