

~PEOPLE OF THE LAND - EARTH (459)

[Hebrew, *am ha- 'a'rets*]

.. As A Term Of Contempt

- This expression Hebrew, *'am ha- 'a'rets*, with its plural forms occurs 67 times in the Hebrew text. In Jesus day it was employed by the religious leaders as a term of contempt, but originally this was not the case.
- The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon by Koehler and Baumgartner explains this Hebrew expression to mean, the citizens possessing the full rights. [Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros, Leiden, 1958, p. 711]
- The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible states that the term, in the strict sense includes only the responsible male citizenry, the married men who live on their own land and have full rights and duties, including the duty of serving in the army and of participating in judicial proceedings and festivals. [Edited by G. A. Buttrick, 1962, Vol. 1, p. 106]
- You are to say to the sons of Israel, Any man of the sons of Israel, and any alien resident who resides as an alien in Israel, who gives any of his offspring to Molech, should be put to death without fail. The people of the land should pelt him to death with stones. (Leviticus 20:2)
- And as for me, I shall set my face against that man, and I will cut him off from among his people, because he has given some of his offspring to Molech for the purpose of defiling my holy place and to profane my holy name. (Leviticus 20:3)
- And if the people of the land should deliberately hide their eyes from that man when he gives any of his offspring to Molech by not putting him to death. (Leviticus 20:4)
- Then I, for my part, shall certainly fix my face against that man and his family, and I shall indeed cut him and all those who have immoral intercourse along with him in having immoral intercourse with Molech off from among their people. (Leviticus 20:5)
- Finally Yehowah plagued the king, and he continued to be a leper until the day of his death, and he kept dwelling in his house

exempt from duties, while Jotham the king's son was over the house, judging the **people** of the land. (2 Kings 15:5)

- And King Ahaz went on to command him, even Urijah the priest, saying; Upon the great altar make the burnt offering of the morning smoke, also the grain offering of the evening and the burnt offering of the king and his grain offering and the burnt offering of all the **people** of the land and their grain offering and their drink offerings, and all the blood of burnt offering and all the blood of a sacrifice you should sprinkle upon it. As for the copper altar, it will become something for me to take under consideration. (2 Kings 16:15)
- As for all the **people** of the land, they will be responsible for this contribution to the chieftain in Israel. (Ezekiel 45:16)
- And on that day, in his own behalf and in behalf of all the **people** of the land, the chieftain must provide a young bull as a sin offering. (Ezekiel 45:22)
- And the **people** of the land must bow down at the entrance of that gate on the Sabbaths and on the new moons, before Yehowah. (Ezekiel 46:3)
- And when the **people** of the land come in before Yehowah in the festal seasons, the one coming in by the way of the north gate in order to bow down should go out by the way of the south gate, and the one coming in by the way of the south gate should go out by the way of the gate to the north. No one should go back by the way of the gate by which he came in, for he should go out straight ahead of him. (Ezekiel 46:9)
- Thus, originally, the expression was one of respect. It did not apply only to a lowly class or those of the poorer element.
- In bargaining for the property rights to the cave of Machpelah, Abraham dealt with the Hittite **people of the land**. RS
- Thereupon Abraham got up and bowed down to the natives, to the sons of Heth. (Genesis 23:7)
- And spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the natives, saying; Only if you, no, listen to me! I will give you the amount of silver for the field. Take it from me, that I may bury my dead there. (Genesis

23:13)

- In these verses both **An American Translation** and the **New World Translation** render the Hebrew *'am ha- 'a'rets* as **natives**. Pharaoh, in speaking to Moses and Aaron, referred to the Israelites dwelling in Goshen as, **the people of the land**.
- And Pharaoh continued; Look! The **people** of the land are now many, and you indeed make them desist from their bearing of burdens. (**Exodus 5:5**)
- The expression was used in the singular to embrace all the **people** of Canaan.
- Only against Yehowah do not rebel, and you, do not you fear the **people** of the land, for they are bread to us. Their shelter has turned away from over them, and Yehowah is with us. Do not fear them. (**Numbers 14:9**)
- And with the plural of *'am*, or *'am-meh*, **peoples** to describe them as forming separate tribes or **peoples** within that land.
- So their sons came in and took the land in possession, and you proceeded to subdue before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and to give them into their hand, even their kings and the **peoples** of the land, to do with them according to their liking. (**Nehemiah 9:24**)
- But you were indulgent with them for many years and kept bearing witness against them by your spirit by means of your prophets, and they did not give ear. Finally you gave them into the hand of the **peoples** of the lands. (**Nehemiah 9:30**)
- It is used in a similar way to refer to the subject **peoples** within the Persian Empire in Queen Esther's time.
- And in all the different jurisdictional districts and in all the different cities wherever the word of the king and his Law were reaching there were rejoicing and exultation for the Jews, a banquet and a good day, and many of the **peoples** of the land were declaring themselves Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen upon them. (**Esther 8:17**)

- Sennacherib used the full plural form *'am-meh' ha- 'ara-tsohth'*, **peoples of the lands** as applying to the many **peoples** or nations conquered by the Assyrian forces.
- Do you not know what I myself and my forefathers did to all the **peoples** of the lands? Did the gods of the nations of the lands at all prove able to deliver their land out of my hand? (**2 Chronicles 32:13**)
- Within the nation of Israel, the phrase *'am ha- 'a'rets*, often distinguished the general citizenry from governmental or priestly officials.
- Then she saw, and there the king was standing by the pillar according to the custom, and the chiefs and the trumpets by the king, and all the people of the land rejoicing and blowing the trumpets. Immediately Athaliah ripped her garments apart and began crying; Conspiracy! Conspiracy! (**2 Kings 11:14**)
- After that all the people of the land came to the house of Baal and pulled down his altars, and his images they broke up thoroughly, and Mattan the priest of Baal they killed before the altars. And the priest proceeded to put overseers over the house of Yehowah. (**2 Kings 11:18**)
- Further, he took the chiefs of hundreds and the Carian bodyguard and the runners and all the people of the land, that they might bring the king down from the house of Yehowah, and they came gradually by the way of the gate of the runners to the king's house, and he began to sit upon the throne of the kings. (**2 Kings 11:19**)
- And all the people of the land continued to rejoice, and the city, for its part, had no disturbance, and Athaliah herself they had put to death with the sword at the king's house. (**2 Kings 11:20**)
- But as for me, here I have made you today a fortified city and an iron pillar and copper walls against all the land, toward the kings of Judah, toward her princes, toward her priests and toward the **people** of the land. (**Jeremiah 1:18**)
- Namely, the princes of Judah and the princes of Jerusalem, the court officials and the priests and all the **people** of the land who went passing between the pieces of the calf. (**Jeremiah 34:19**)

- And he himself and his servants and the **people** of the land did not listen to the words of Yehowah that he spoke by means of Jeremiah the prophet. (**Jeremiah 37:2**)
- As for the sacrificial smoke that you made in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your forefathers, your kings and your princes and the **people** of the land, was it not this that Yehowah remembered and that proceeded to come up into his heart? (**Jeremiah 44:21**)
- The king himself will go into mourning, even a chieftain will clothe himself with desolation, and the very hands of the **people** of the land will get disturbed. According to their way I shall act toward them, and with their judgments I shall judge them, and they will have to know that I am Yehowah. (**Ezekiel 7:27**)
- And we have not listened to your servants the prophets, who have spoken in your name to our kings, our princes and our forefathers and to all the **people** of the land. (**Daniel 9:6**)
- Say to all the **people** of the land and to the priests; When you fasted and there was a wailing in the fifth month and in the seventh month, and this for seventy years, did you really fast to me, even me? (**Zechariah 7:5**)
- However, it is evident that it embraced not merely the poor laboring class but also included persons of means, since Ezekiel, after decrying the injustices committed by greedy prophets, priests, and princes, inveighs against **the people of the land** who have carried on a scheme of defrauding and have done a tearing away in robbery, and the afflicted one and the poor one they have maltreated, and the alien resident they have defrauded without justice.
- There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst of her, like the roaring lion, tearing prey. A soul they actually devour. Treasure and precious things they keep taking. Her widows they have multiplied in the midst of her. (**Ezekiel 22:25**)
- Her priests themselves have done violence to my Law, and they keep profaning my holy places. Between the holy thing and the common they have made no distinction, and between the unclean thing and the clean they have made nothing known, and from my Sabbaths they have hidden their eyes, and I am

profaned in the midst of them. (**Ezekiel 22:26**)

- Her princes in the midst of her are like wolves tearing prey in shedding blood, in destroying souls for the purpose of making unjust gain. (**Ezekiel 22:27**)
- And her prophets have plastered for them with whitewash, visioning an unreality and divining for them a lie, saying; This is what the Sovereign Lord Yehowah has said; when Yehowah himself has not spoken. (**Ezekiel 22:28**)
- The **people** of the land themselves have carried on a scheme of defrauding and have done a tearing away in robbery, and the afflicted one and the poor one they have maltreated, and the alien resident they have defrauded without justice. (**Ezekiel 22:29**)
- To pay the heavy duties imposed by Pharaoh Nechoh, King Jehoiakim exacted the silver and the gold from the **people** of the land by means of taxation. Thus the *'am ha- 'a'rets* that struck down the conspirators against King Amon and made Josiah king or that later made Jehoahaz king were no so-called rabble element.
- So his servants conveyed him dead in a chariot from Megiddo and brought him to Jerusalem and buried him in his grave. Then the **people** of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah and anointed him and made him king in place of his father. (**2 Kings 23:30**)
- And the silver and the gold Jehoiakim gave to Pharaoh. Only he taxed the land, to give the silver at the order of Pharaoh. According to each one's individual tax rate he exacted the silver and the gold from the **people** of the land, to give it to Pharaoh Nechoh. (**2 Kings 23:35**)
- But the **people** of the land struck down all the conspirators against King Amon. Then the people of the land made Josiah his son king in place of him. (**2 Kings 21:24**)
- When Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah, 60 men of the **people of the land** were included along with the high court officials who were taken to Riblah and executed, these 60 doubtless being among the more prominent or leading citizens.
- And from the city he took one court official that had a command

over the men of war, and five men from those having access to the king that were found in the city, and the secretary of the chief of the army, the one mustering the **people** of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land that were to be found in the city. (2 Kings 25:19)

- And Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguard then took them and conducted them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. (2 Kings 25:20)
- And the king of Babylon proceeded to strike them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. Thus Judah went into exile from off its soil. (2 Kings 25:21)
- Of course, the phrase *'am ha- 'a'rets*, did embrace the poor and lowly citizens as well, and the king of Babylon designated a number of such to remain in Judah, as he had done earlier in Jerusalem.
- And he took into exile all Jerusalem and all the princes and all the valiant, mighty men, ten thousand he was taking into exile, and also every craftsman and builder of bulwarks. No one had been left behind except the lowly class of the **people** of the land. (2 Kings 24:14)
- And some of the lowly **people** of the land the chief of the bodyguard let remain as vinedressers and compulsory laborers. (2 Kings 25:12)
- In time all the chiefs of the military forces who were in the field, they and their men, got to hear that the king of Babylon had commissioned Gedaliah the son of Ahikam over the land and that he had commissioned him over the men and women and little children and some of the lowly **people** of the land, who had not been taken into exile in Babylon. (Jeremiah 40:7)
- And some of the lowly ones of the **people** and the rest of the people that were left remaining in the city and the deserters that had fallen away to the king of Babylon and the rest of the master workmen Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguard took into exile. (Jeremiah 52:15)
- And some of the lowly ones of the land Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguard let remain as vinedressers and as compulsory laborers. (Jeremiah 52:16)

- In postexilic times Ezra and Nehemiah condemned the wrong practice of the returned exiles in mingling with the **peoples** of the land(s), marrying their women, allowing them to carry on commerce within the city on the Sabbath, and learning their detestable practices.
- Which you commanded by means of your servants the prophets, saying; The land that you **people** are going in to take possession of is an impure land because of the impurity of the peoples of the lands, because of their detestable things with which they have filled it from end to end by their uncleanness. (**Ezra 9:11**)
- Then Shecaniah the son of Jehiel of the sons of Elam answered and said to Ezra; We, we have acted unfaithfully against our God, so that we gave a dwelling to foreign wives from the **peoples** of the land. Yet now there exists a hope for Israel concerning this. (**Ezra 10:2**)
- And now make confession to Yehowah the God of your forefathers and do his pleasure and separate yourselves from the **peoples** of the land and from the foreign wives. (**Ezra 10:11**)
- As for the rest of the **people**, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim and everyone separating himself from the peoples of the lands to the Law of the true God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, everyone having knowledge and understanding. (**Nehemiah 10:28**)
- As for the **peoples** of the land who were bringing in wares and every kind of cereal on the Sabbath day to sell, we should take nothing from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day, and we should forego the seventh year and the debt of every hand. (**Nehemiah 10:31**)
- The expression here referred to the surrounding non-Israelite **peoples** specified at;
- And as soon as these things were finished, the princes approached me, saying; The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands as regards their detestable things, namely, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. (**Ezra 9:1**)

- For they have accepted some of their daughters for themselves and for their sons, and they, the holy seed, have become mingled with the peoples of the lands, and the hand of the princes and the deputy rulers has proved to be foremost in this unfaithfulness. ([Ezra 9:2](#))
- And the reason for separating from them was not because of any low social or economic position on their part but because of God's Law requiring purity of worship.
- As for the rest of the **people**, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim and everyone separating himself from the peoples of the lands to the Law of the true God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, everyone having knowledge and understanding. ([Nehemiah 10:28](#))
- They were adhering to their brothers, their majestic ones, and coming into liability to a curse and into an oath, to walk in the Law of the true God, which had been given by the hand of Moses the servant of the true God, and to keep and to perform all the commandments of Yehowah our Lord and his judicial decisions and his regulations. ([Nehemiah 10:29](#))
- And that we should not give our daughters to the **peoples** of the land, and their daughters we should not take for our sons. ([Nehemiah 10:30](#))

.. As A Term Of Contempt

- In course of time, however, the religious leaders of Judah began to use the term to designate those persons, Jewish or non-Jewish, who were unlearned in the Law and more particularly those who were ignorant of or who failed to observe in detail the great body of rabbinic traditions that now developed.
- Then there came to Jesus from Jerusalem Pharisees and scribes, saying; ([Matthew 15:1](#))
- Why is it your disciples overstep the tradition of the men of former times? For example, they do not wash their hands when about to eat a meal. ([Matthew 15:2](#))
- The term expressed the contemptuous attitude exemplified in the statement of the Pharisees at;

- But this crowd that does not know the Law are **accursed people**. (John 7:49)
- This crowd that does not know the Law are **accursed people**. Rabbi Joshua said that an, *'am ha- 'a'rets* is; Anyone who does not put on *tefillin*, phylacteries.
- Other rabbinic statements applying to such nonobservers of Jewish traditions were; Even if one has learnt Scripture and Mishnah, if he has not ministered to the disciples of the wise, he is an *'am ha-arez*. [Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 47b, translated by M. Simon]
- Neither is an ignorant person *'am ha- 'a'rets* **pious**. [Babylonian Talmud, [Avot 2:5], translated by J. Isstam] **The illiterate will not be resurrected**. [Babylonian Talmud, Ketubbot 111b, translated by S. Daiches]
- But on seeing this the Pharisees began to say to his disciples; Why is it that your teacher eats with tax collectors and sinners? (Matthew 9:11)
- Consequently both the Pharisees and the scribes kept muttering, saying; This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. (Luke 15:2)
- The Pharisee stood and began to pray these things to himself, O God, I thank you I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unrighteous, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. (Luke 18:11)
- Jesus, however, said that he came to call sinners, and he showed affection for the **people** who were thrown about like sheep without a shepherd.
- Go, then, and learn what this means, I want mercy, and not sacrifice. For I came to call, not righteous **people**, but sinners. (Matthew 9:13)
- On seeing the crowds he felt pity for them, because they were skinned and thrown about like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)
- Thus the sense of *'am ha- 'a'rets*, changed from one of general respect to one of religious opprobrium, much as the **Latin** term *paganus*, from which the **English** word, **pagan**, is derived.

- **Pagan** originally meant simply a dweller in a rural community, but since those country **people** were often the last to be converted, it came to be used by city dwellers as applying to all who did not adopt their professed Christian beliefs. In a similar way the term, **heathen**, at first meant simply one who lived out on the **heath** or field.