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## EXODUS 5. 4-5

### THE MEANING OF עַם הָאָרֶץ

BY SAMUEL DAICHES, Jews' College, London.

JUDGE SULZBERGER has, in his essay 'The Am Ha-Aretz', established the theory, in my opinion, beyond doubt, that עַם הָאָרֶץ in the Bible means 'representatives of the people', 'Parliament'. A careful examination of all the Biblical passages in which עַם הָאָרֶץ occurs has strengthened me in my conviction that the meaning of 'representatives of the people', 'Parliament', for עַם הָאָרֶץ is still more extensive than Judge Sulzberger ventured to presume. It seems to me that this is the ordinary meaning of עַם הָאָרֶץ in the Bible. 'Representatives of the people', 'Parliament', fits everywhere, not only historically but also exegetically. Exodus 5. 4-5 is, I think, a good instance.

I suggest that in Exodus 5. 5 (a passage not considered by Judge Sulzberger) עַם הָאָרֶץ has the meaning of 'representatives of the people'. And by accepting that meaning we get rid of the difficulty which the commentators find in Exodus 5. 4-5. 5. 5 appears to be a repetition of 5. 4, and therefore the two verses are ascribed to different sources (see commentaries). 'Representatives of the people', however, makes the meaning of the two verses perfectly clear.

In 5. 4 Pharaoh tells Moses and Aaron that they should not disturb 'the people', the ordinary workmen, in their

work. In 5. 5 Pharaoh tells Moses and Aaron that by their conduct they would influence 'the representatives of the people', and make them rest from their burdens. The difference is great. It is not accidental that in 5. 4 the word *ממעשיו* is used, and in 5. 5 the word *מסבלהם*. *מעשה* is the ordinary work done by the manual labourers. *סבל* is, I take it, the 'burden', the office of supervising the work of the labourers. The ordinary people (*העם*) did the manual labour, and Moses and Aaron and the other representatives of the people (*עם הארץ*) supervised the work of the labourers. Hence the distinction also in 5. 4 between *מעשה* and *סבל*. To Moses and Aaron Pharaoh says *לכו לסבלתיכם* 'go unto your burdens', go unto your posts of overseers. That *סבל* has the meaning of 'burden (office) of overseer' is also clear from Exodus 1. 11. *ענהו* refers to the people of Israel; *בסבלתם* refers to the Egyptian taskmasters. That there were Hebrew overseers we see from Exodus 5. 14, 19. The meaning of vers. 4-5 is now quite clear. The following would be the translation of the two verses:

(4) And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, cause the people to break loose from their work? Get you unto your burdens (posts of overseers). (5) And Pharaoh said: Behold, the representatives of the people are now many, and ye will make them rest from their burdens (posts of overseers).

Thus there is no repetition in these two verses. Both verses are required. Pharaoh tells Moses and Aaron that as a result of their activities the labourers will stop their work, and the representatives of the people will cease fulfilling their duties as overseers.