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EXODUS 5:1 Afterward Moses and Aaron came, and said to Pharaoh, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'"

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Moses and Aaron open their commission to Pharaoh, Exo 5:1. He insultingly asks who Jehovah is, in whose name they require him to dismiss the people, Exo 5:2. They explain, Exo 5:3. He charges them with making the people disaffected, Exo 5:4, Exo 5:5; and commands the task-masters to increase their work, and lessen their means of performing it, Exo 5:6-9. The task-masters do as commanded, and refuse to give the people straw to assist them in making brick, and yet require the fulfillment of their daily tasks as formerly, when furnished with all the necessary means, Exo 5:10-13. The Israelites failing to produce the ordinary quantity of brick, their own officers, set over them by the task-masters, are cruelly insulted and beaten, Exo 5:14. The officers complain to Pharaoh, Exo 5:15, Exo 5:16; but find no redress, Exo 5:17, Exo 5:18. The officers, finding their case desperate, bitterly reproach Moses and Aaron for bringing them into their present circumstances, Exo 5:19-21. Moses retires, and lays the matter before the Lord, and pleads with him, Exo 5:22, Exo 5:23.

#### Verse 1

And afterward Moses and Aaron went - This chapter is properly a continuation of the preceding, as the succeeding is a continuation of this; and to preserve the connection of the facts they should be read together.

How simply, and yet with what authority, does Moses deliver his message to the Egyptian king! Thus saith Jehovah, God of Israel, Let my people go. It is well in this, as in almost every other case where יהוה Jehovah occurs, to preserve the original word: our using the word Lord is not sufficiently expressive, and often leaves the sense indistinct.

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EXODUS 5:2 Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should listen to his voice to let Israel go? I don't know the LORD, and moreover I will not let Israel go."

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#### Verse 2

Who is the Lord - Who is Jehovah, that I should obey his voice? What claims has he on me? I am under no obligation to him. Pharaoh spoke here under the common persuasion that every place and people had a tutelary deity, and he supposed that this Jehovah might be the tutelary deity of the Israelites, to whom he, as an Egyptian, could be under no kind of obligation. It is not judicious to bring this question as a proof that Pharaoh was an atheist: of this the text affords no evidence.

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EXODUS 5:3 They said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the LORD, our God, lest he fall on us with pestilence, or with the sword."

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#### Verse 3

Three days' journey - The distance from Goshen to Sinai; see Exo 3:18.

And sacrifice unto the Lord - Great stress is laid on this circumstance. God required sacrifice; no religious acts which they performed could be acceptable to him without this. He had now showed them that it was their indispensable duty thus to worship him, and that if they did not they might expect him to send the pestilence - some plague or death proceeding immediately from himself, or the sword - extermination by the hands of an enemy. The original word דבר דבר, from דבר דabar, to drive off, draw under, etc., which we translate pestilence from the Latin pestis, the plague, signifies any kind of disease by which an extraordinary mortality is occasioned, and which appears from the circumstances of the case to come immediately from God. The Israelites could not sacrifice in the land of Egypt, because the animals they were to offer to God were held sacred by the Egyptians; and they could not omit this duty, because it was essential to religion even before the giving of the law. Thus we find that Divine justice required the life of the animal for the life of the transgressor, and the people were conscious, if this were not done, that God would consume them with the pestilence or the sword. From the foundation of the world the true religion required sacrifice. Before, under, and after the law, this was deemed essential to salvation. Under the Christian dispensation Jesus is the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world; and being still the Lamb newly slain before the throne, no man cometh unto the Father but by him. "In this first application to Pharaoh, we observe," says Dr. Dodd, "that proper respectful submission which is due from subjects to their sovereign. They represent to him the danger they should be in by disobeying their God, but do not so much as hint at any punishment that would follow to Pharaoh."

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EXODUS 5:4 The king of Egypt said to them, "Why do you, Moses and Aaron, take the people from their work? Get back to your burdens!"

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#### Verse 4

Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron - He hints that the Hebrews are in a state of revolt, and charges Moses and Aaron as being ringleaders of the sedition. This unprincipled charge has been, in nearly similar circumstances, often repeated since. Men who have labored to bring the mass of the common people from ignorance, irreligion, and general profligacy of manners, to an acquaintance with themselves and God, and to a proper knowledge of their duty to him and to each other, have been often branded as being disaffected to the state, and as movers of sedition among the people! See Clarke on Exo 5:17 (note).

Let the people - תפריעו taphriu, from פרע para, to loose or disengage, which we translate to let, from the Anglo-Saxon lettan, to hinder. Ye hinder the people from working. Get ye to your burdens. "Let religion alone, and mind your work." The language not only of tyranny, but of the basest irreligion also.

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EXODUS 5:5 Pharaoh said, "Behold, the people of the land are now many, and you make them rest from their burdens."

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#### Verse 5

The people of the land now are many - The sanguinary edict had no doubt been long before repealed, or they could not have multiplied so greatly.

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EXODUS 5:6 The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, and their officers, saying,

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#### Verse 6

The task-masters of the people and their officers - The task-masters were Egyptians, (see Clarke on Exo 1:11 (note)), the officers were Hebrews; see Clarke below Exo 5:14 (note). But it is probable that the task-masters Exo 1:11, who are called שרי מסים sarey missim, princes of the burdens or taxes, were different from those termed taskmasters here, as the words are different; נגשים nogesim signifies exactors or oppressors - persons who exacted from them an unreasonable proportion either of labor or money.

Officers - שטררים shoterim; those seem to have been an inferior sort of officers, who attended on superior officers or magistrates to execute their orders. They are supposed to have been something like our sheriffs.

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EXODUS 5:7 “You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick, as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves.

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#### Verse 7

Straw to make brick - There have been many conjectures concerning the use of straw in making bricks. Some suppose it was used merely for burning them, but this is unfounded. The eastern bricks are often made of clay and straw kneaded together, and then not burned, but thoroughly dried in the sun. This is expressly mentioned by Philo in his life of Moses, who says, describing the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt, that some were obliged to work in clay for the formation of bricks, and others to gather straw for the same purpose, because straw is the bond by which the brick is held together, πλιθου γαρ αχορα δεσμος - Phil. Oper., edit. Mang., vol. ii., p. 86. And Philo's account is confirmed by the most intelligent travelers. Dr. Shaw says that the straw in the bricks still preserves its original color, which is a proof that the bricks were never burned. Some of these are still to be seen in the cabinets of the curious; and there are several from ancient Babylon now before me, where the straw which was amalgamated with the clay is still perfectly visible. From this we may see the reason of the complaint made to Pharaoh, Exo 5:16 : the Egyptians refused to give the necessary portion of straw for kneading the bricks, and yet they required that the full tale or number of bricks should be produced each day as they did when all the necessary materials were brought to hand; so the people were obliged to go over all the cornfields, and pluck up the stubble, which they were obliged to substitute for straw. See Exo 5:12.

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EXODUS 5:8 The number of the bricks, which they made before, you require from them. You shall not diminish anything of it, for they are idle; therefore they cry, saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.'

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Verse 8

And the tale of the bricks - Tale signifies the number, from the Anglo-Saxon to number, to count, etc.

For they be idle; therefore they cry - Let us go and sacrifice - Thus their desire to worship the true God in a proper manner was attributed to their unwillingness to work; a reflection which the Egyptians (in principle) of the present day cast on these who, while they are fervent in spirit serving the Lord, are not slothful in business. See Clarke below Exo 5:17 (note).

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EXODUS 5:9 Let heavier work be laid on the men, that they may labour therein; and don't let them pay any attention to lying words."

EXODUS 5:10 The taskmasters of the people went out, and their officers, and they spoke to the people, saying, "This is what Pharaoh says: 'I will not give you straw.

EXODUS 5:11 Go yourselves, get straw where you can find it, for nothing of your work shall be diminished.'"

EXODUS 5:12 So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw.

EXODUS 5:13 The taskmasters were urgent saying, "Fulfil your work quota daily, as when there was straw!"

EXODUS 5:14 The officers of the children of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and demanded, "Why haven't you fulfilled your quota both yesterday and today, in making brick as before?"

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Verse 14

And the officers - were beaten - Probably bastinadoed; for this is the common punishment in Egypt to the present day for minor offenses. The manner of it is this: the culprit lies on his belly, his legs being turned up behind erect, and the executioner gives him so many blows on the soles of the feet with a stick. This is a very severe punishment, the sufferer not being able to walk for many weeks after, and some are lamed by it through the whole of their lives.

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EXODUS 5:15 Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, saying, "Why do you deal this way with your servants?"

EXODUS 5:16 No straw is given to your servants, and they tell us, 'Make brick!' and behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people."

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## Verse 16

The fault is in thine own people - תַּטַּח chatath, the sin, is in thy own people. 1st. Because they require impossibilities; and 2dly, because they punish us for not doing what cannot be performed.

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EXODUS 5:17 But he said, "You are idle! You are idle! Therefore you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.'

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## Verse 17

Ye are idle - therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice - It is common for those who feel unconcerned about their own souls to attribute the religious earnestness of others, who feel the importance of eternal things, to idleness or a disregard of their secular concerns. Strange that they cannot see there is a medium! He who has commanded them to be diligent in business, has also commanded them to be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. He whose diligence in business is not connected with a true religious fervor of spirit, is a lover of the world; and whatever form he may have he has not the power of godliness, and therefore is completely out of the road to salvation.

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EXODUS 5:18 Go therefore now, and work, for no straw shall be given to you, yet you shall deliver the same number of bricks!"

EXODUS 5:19 The officers of the children of Israel saw that they were in trouble, when it was said, "You shall not diminish anything from your daily quota of bricks!"

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## Verse 19

Did see that they were in evil case - They saw that they could neither expect justice nor mercy; that their deliverance was very doubtful, and their case almost hopeless.

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EXODUS 5:20 They met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came out from Pharaoh:

EXODUS 5:21 and they said to them, "May the LORD look at you, and judge, because you have made us a stench to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us."

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## Verse 21

The Lord look upon you, and judge - These were hasty and unkind expressions; but the afflicted must be allowed the privilege of complaining; it is all the solace that such sorrow can find; and if in such distress words are spoken which should not be justified, yet the considerate and benevolent will hear them with indulgence. God is merciful; and the stroke of this people was heavier even than their groaning.

Put a sword in their hand - Given them a pretense which they had not before, to oppress us even unto death.

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EXODUS 5:22 Moses returned to the LORD, and said, "Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Why is it that you have sent me?"

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#### Verse 22

And Moses returned unto the Lord - This may imply, either that there was a particular place into which Moses ordinarily went to commune with Jehovah; or it may mean that kind of turning of heart and affection to God, which every pious mind feels itself disposed to practice in any time or place. The old adage will apply here: "A praying heart never lacks a praying place." Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? - It is certain that in this address Moses uses great plainness of speech. Whether the offspring of a testy impatience and undue familiarity, or of strong faith which gave him more than ordinary access to the throne of his gracious Sovereign, it would be difficult to say. The latter appears to be the most probable, as we do not find, from the succeeding chapter, that God was displeased with his freedom; we may therefore suppose that it was kept within due bounds, and that the principles and motives were all pure and good. However, it should be noted, that such freedom of speech with the Most High should never be used but on very special occasions, and then only by his extraordinary messengers.

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EXODUS 5:23 For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people; neither have you delivered your people at all."

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#### Verse 23

He hath done evil to this people - Their misery is increased instead of being diminished.

Neither hast thou delivered thy people at all - The marginal reading is both literal and correct: And delivering thou hast not delivered. Thou hast begun the work by giving us counsels and a commission, but thou hast not brought the people from under their bondage. Thou hast signified thy pleasure relative to their deliverance, but thou hast not brought them out of the hands of their enemies.

1. It is no certain proof of the displeasure of God that a whole people, or an individual, may be found in a state of great oppression and distress; nor are affluence and prosperity any certain signs of his approbation. God certainly loved the Israelites better than he did the Egyptians; yet the former were in the deepest adversity, while the latter were in the height of prosperity. Luther once observed, that if secular prosperity were to be considered as a criterion of the Divine approbation, then the grand Turk must be the highest in the favor of God, as he was at that time the most prosperous sovereign on the earth. An observation of this kind, on a case so obvious, was really well calculated to repress hasty conclusions drawn from these external states, and to lay down a correct rule of judgment for all such occasions.

2. In all our addresses to God we should ever remember that we have sinned against him, and deserve nothing but punishment from his hand. We should therefore bow before him with the

deepest humiliation of soul, and take that caution of the wise man, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few," Ecc 5:2. There is the more need to attend to this caution, because many ignorant though well-meaning people use very improper, not to say indecent, freedoms in their addresses to the throne of grace. With such proceedings God cannot be well pleased; and he who has not a proper impression of the dignity and excellence of the Divine Nature, is not in such a disposition as it is essentially necessary to feel in order to receive help from God. He who knows he has sinned, and feels that he is less than the least of all God's mercies, will pray with the deepest humility, and even rejoice before God with trembling. A solemn Awe of the Divine Majesty is not less requisite to successful praying, than faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. When we have such a commission as that of Moses, we may make use of his freedom of speech; but till then, the publican's prayer will best suit the generality of those who are even dignified by the name of Christian - Lord, be merciful to me, a Sinner!