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**Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.**

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**MAY 22, 2021**

## **When Israel refused to put God first**

Putting God first can be difficult. What can we learn from Israel, who refused to put God first?

When Moses returned to Egypt to free the people of Israel, it was clear that they weren't ready. Centuries of slavery had corroded their vision of God and themselves. Nonetheless, God delivered on His promise to Abraham.

Once in the desert, they were technically free. Except they had no idea how free people lived. They would sooner return to bondage than rely on a God they could not see. But God was patient with them, demonstrating His love daily through the cloud, the fire and manna.

God's law was the set of instructions they needed to learn how to be free. This was especially true of the Sabbath, which clearly outlines how to worship God and how to respect human beings and creation alike.

But their most decisive moment as a people wasn't related to the Sabbath or the law. They were to be tested on their reason and their faith. When the 12 spies were sent as representative of the tribes to survey the land, they did not return with conflicting reports. All spies agreed about the quality of the land. It was exactly as it has been described. But they diverged in their interpretation of the facts.

Joshua and Caleb were rational. They built their case on the fact God had freed them already from the most powerful nation on earth at the time. This mighty salvation was clear evidence that God would continue to fulfill His promises. They were willing to put God first because of the evidence they had seen.

Along with the rest of the people of Israel, the other 10 spies were overtaken with irrational fear. They refused to put God first because they chose to ignore the evidence of how God had led them in the past. The consequences were devastating. God decided to keep that entire generation wandering in the desert until their death. Only their children would inherit Canaan.

Sometimes we are like those 10 spies. We have already seen first-hand how God is faithful when we take our tithe and offerings seriously. Sometimes, however, we are still tempted to ignore the facts and give in to fear. Putting God first in our tithe and offerings means trusting the evidence of what we have already seen.

Israel refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for them and the world around them. God's love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while Israel's example is a warning for us today. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.