

Deuteronomy 21:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated:

Analysis

If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated (פִּי־תֵהֵי־לְאִישׁ שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים) (הָאִחָה אֲהוּבָה וְהָאִחָה שְׂנוּאָה)—The law acknowledges polygamy's reality without endorsing it. Ahuv (beloved) and senu'ah (hated) describe the emotional favoritism that destroys families. The term "hated" doesn't necessarily mean active malice, but comparative neglect—loved less (cf. Genesis 29:31, where Leah was "hated" compared to Rachel).

And the firstborn son be hers that was hated (וְהָיָה הַבֵּן הַבְּכֹר לְשְׂנוּאָה)—The issue is inheritance rights: will the father manipulate the bechor (firstborn) status to favor the beloved wife's son? The law protects the legal rights of the less-favored wife's son, preventing emotional favoritism from corrupting legal justice.

Historical Context

Jacob's family perfectly illustrates this: he loved Rachel over Leah, yet Leah's sons (especially Judah) carried the messianic line. Genesis 29:31 says "the LORD saw that Leah was hated," using the same Hebrew root. This law prevents repeating Jacob's favoritism that nearly destroyed his family through jealousy and violence (Genesis 37).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does parental favoritism damage families, and what safeguards can protect against it?
2. In what ways does God's concern for the "hated" wife and her children reflect His heart for the overlooked and disadvantaged?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	תְהִי יָן	לֹא יֵשׁ	שְׁתֵּי י	נָשִׁים	וְאֶחָד ת	הָאֶחָדָה ה
H3588	H1961	If a man	have two	wives	and another	beloved
		H376	H8147	H802	H259	H157
וְאֶחָד ת	וְהַשְׂנוּאָה ה	וְיִלְדוּ	ל	הֵבֶן	הָאֶחָדָה ה	
and another	and the hated	and they have born	H0	him children	beloved	
H259	H8130	H3205		H1121	H157	
וְהַשְׂנוּאָה ה	וְהִי ה	הֵבֶן	הֵבֶן ר	לְשִׁנְיָאָה:		
and the hated	H1961	him children	and if the firstborn	be hers that was hated		
H8130		H1121	H1060	H8146		

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 29:33 (Parallel theme): And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the LORD hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon.

