

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 (פִּרְתָּחִיאֵל לְאִישׁ שְׁתִּים שְׁתִּים)—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 (וְפִיה הַבָּן הַבָּכָר לְשָׂנִיאָה)—The issue is inheritance rights: will the father manipulate the bekhor (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

בְּאֶחָדָה הָיָה וּבְאֶחָדָה נָשָׁה יְמִינָה
H3588 H1961 If a man have two wives and another beloved
H376 H8147 H802 H259 H157

לֹא יְשַׁתְּחִווּ יְמִינָה וְשִׁנְוָא הַלְּדוֹן וְלֹא בְּבֵבֶן וְבְּבֵבֶן
and another and the hated and they have born H0 him children beloved
H259 H8130 H3205 H1121 H157

לְשִׁנְוָא: בְּבֵבֶן וְלֹא בְּבֵבֶן וְשִׁנְוָא הַלְּדוֹן
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.

