

# Deuteronomy 21:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn:

## Analysis

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**Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn** (וְהָיָה בְיוֹם הַנְחִילוֹ אֶת־בְּנָיו) ... (לא יוכל לבְּכֹר)—The verb nachol (to cause to inherit) describes the father's distribution of estate. The prohibition lo yukhal levaker (he cannot make firstborn) blocks manipulating the bechor rights. The double portion belonging to the firstborn (v. 17) was legal right, not paternal preference.

**Before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn** (עַל־פְּנֵי בֶן־הַשְּׂנוֹאָה) (הַבְּכֹר)—The phrase al penei (before/in the face of) means "in place of" or "at the expense of." The law protects objective birth order over subjective affection. Though the father loved one wife more, legal rights cannot be redistributed based on emotion. Justice trumps favoritism.

## Historical Context

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This law would have prevented Abraham from disinheriting Ishmael for Isaac (though God commanded that specific case), or Isaac from favoring Esau over Jacob. Later, David's failure to discipline Adonijah (who acted as firstborn despite not being so, 1 Kings 1:5-6) nearly cost Solomon the throne, showing the chaos when birth order rights are ignored.

## Related Passages

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**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

**James 2:17** — Faith and works

**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

## Study Questions

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1. How does this law's insistence on objective rights over emotional preference challenge modern culture's elevation of personal feelings as ultimate authority?
2. In what areas of life are you tempted to let personal favoritism override established obligations and commitments?

## Interlinear Text

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וְהָיָה הַיּוֹם הַהוּא לְבָנֵי אֱשֶׁר יֵאָמָר בְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי

H1961      **Then it shall be when**      **to inherit**      H853      **he maketh his sons**      H853      H834

H3117      H5157      H1121

הַיּוֹם הַהוּא לְבָנֵי אֱשֶׁר יֵאָמָר בְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי

H1961      H0      H3808      **that which he hath that he may**      **which is indeed the firstborn**

H3201      H1060

אֶת בְּנֵי אֱהוּבָה עַל פְּנֵי יְהוָה

H853      **he maketh his sons**      **of the beloved**      H5921      **before**      **he maketh his sons**

H1121      H157      H6440      H1121

הַשְּׂנוֹאָה הַיּוֹם הַהוּא לְבָנֵי אֱשֶׁר יֵאָמָר

**of the hated**      **which is indeed the firstborn**

H8130      H1060

## Additional Cross-References

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**1 Chronicles 26:10** (Parallel theme): Also Hosah, of the children of Merari, had sons; Simri the chief, (for though he was not the firstborn, yet his father made him the chief;)

**1 Chronicles 5:2** (Parallel theme): For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's:)

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