

# Deuteronomy 21:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.

## Analysis

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**But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath**—The Hebrew bekhor (firstborn) carries legal and theological weight throughout Scripture. The pi shenayim ("double portion," literally "mouth of two") means the firstborn receives twice what other sons receive, not two-thirds of the estate. If there are three sons, the estate is divided into four parts: the firstborn gets two, the others one each.

**For he is the beginning of his strength**—Reshit ono ("beginning of his strength") refers to the father's first exercise of procreative power, establishing the firstborn's unique status. **The right of the firstborn is his** (mishpat ha-bekorah) —this is a legal entitlement, not parental preference. The law prohibits favoritism based on affection for one wife over another, addressing the exact situation in Jacob's household where he favored Rachel over Leah yet had to acknowledge Reuben's legal status (Genesis 49:3).

This law protects inheritance rights from paternal caprice and foreshadows Christ as the eternal Firstborn who receives the full inheritance (Colossians 1:15-18; Hebrews 1:2). The double portion also prefigured Elisha's request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit (2 Kings 2:9).

## Historical Context

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In ancient Near Eastern patriarchal society (circa 1406 BCE), inheritance customs varied, but the firstborn generally received preferential treatment. This Mosaic law standardizes the practice for Israel, establishing clear legal protections against favoritism. Polygamy created complex household dynamics where a man might love one wife more than another—as with Jacob, Elkanah (1 Samuel 1:5), and others. Without this law, fathers could disinherit legitimate heirs based on maternal preference, creating injustice and family discord. The law reflects God's concern for impartial justice and protection of the vulnerable, even within family structures.

## Related Passages

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**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

## Study Questions

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1. How does God's prohibition against favoritism in inheritance reflect His impartial justice and challenge our tendency toward preferential treatment?
2. In what ways does the firstborn's double portion and its protection by law illuminate Christ's role as the Firstborn who shares His inheritance with adopted co-heirs (Romans 8:17)?

## Interlinear Text

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בְּכֶם	רָאשׁ	אֶת	כִּי	בְּכֶם	רָאשׁ	הַשְׁנִיא	הַ	בְּ	כִּי	רָאשׁ	רָאשׁ	וְ	כִּי	
H3588	H853	for the firstborn		H1060		H1121		H8130		H5234				
לְתַת	לְ	לֹז	פִּ	שְׁנִיא	בְּ	לְ	אָשֶׁר	בְּכֶם	לְ	אָשֶׁר	בְּ	לְ	לְ	
by giving	H0	portion		H6310	him a double	H8147		H3605	H834	of all that he hath	H0		H4672	
הָוֹא	כִּי	רָאשׁ	יְתָ	H7225	for he is the beginning		of his strength	H202	H0	the right	H0		H4941	

בְּכֶם:  
of the firstborn  
H1062

## Additional Cross-References

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**Genesis 49:3** (Parallel theme): Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power:

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