

Proverbs 16:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.

Analysis

This verse articulates the Reformed doctrine of divine providence and sovereignty over human agency. While man possesses genuine moral agency to plan ('deviseth' from Hebrew 'chashab'), God exercises ultimate governance over outcomes ('directeth' from 'kun', to establish). This is not fatalism but acknowledgment that God's decree works through human volition. The verse provides comfort: our plans matter, yet God ensures His purposes prevail. It balances human responsibility with divine sovereignty, a tension Scripture maintains throughout (Philippians 2:12-13).

Historical Context

This proverb belongs to Solomon's collection addressing kingship and governance (Proverbs 16:1-33). In the ancient Near East, where human rulers claimed absolute power, this wisdom reminds even kings that Yahweh alone directs history's course.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How should divine sovereignty affect the way you make plans and set goals?
2. Can you identify a time when God redirected your steps in ways you didn't expect? How did that deepen your trust in His providence?

Interlinear Text

ב	ל	דָּם	אֶת	בִּשְׁׁלֵשׁ	וְדִרְכּוֹ	וְיְהוָה	ה	יָדָה	יְיָ	צִמְדָּו:
heart	A man's	deviseth	his way	but the LORD	directeth	his steps				
H3820	H120	H2803	H1870	H3068	H3559	H6806				

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 19:21 (References Lord): There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.

Psalms 37:23 (References Lord): The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.

Proverbs 16:1 (References Lord): The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD.

Proverbs 20:24 (References Lord): Man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?

Jeremiah 10:23 (References Lord): O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

Proverbs 21:30 (References Lord): There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD.

Isaiah 46:10 (Parallel theme): Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: