

WHO DIRECTS OUR STEPS?

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Jeremiah 10:23 says, “*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps.*” This statement applies to mankind today as much as it did some 2,600 years ago when it was originally inspired through the prophet Jeremiah. It is for God, not us, to direct our steps. The question is, How does the Lord direct our steps?

The Hebrew word *kuwn*

“Direct” (translated from the Hebrew word *kuwn*) literally means “to erect” or “to set up or establish.” This is a common word which is used in a variety of ways. This word is sometimes used to refer to events or outcomes that God has foreordained, such as the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine in Egypt during the time of Joseph (Gen 41:32). Similarly, God prepared the land of Canaan for the children of Israel (Exod 15:17; 23:20). God established Israel as a nation (Deut 32:6), as His people (2 Sam 7:24; Psa 87:5), and in their efforts to obey Him (2 Chr 29:36). He establishes all earthly nations and kingdoms (1 Sam 13:13; 2 Sam 5:12; 7:12-13,16,26; 1 Kgs 2:12,24,45-46). God has established the earth (Psa 24:1-2), “ordained” the heavens (Psa 8:3), and makes the world “stable,” that it not be moved (1 Chr 16:30; Psa 93:1; 96:10; 119:90). Spiritually, God establishes the righteous (2 Chr 29:36; Psa 7:9), renews a right spirit in them (Psa 51:10), prepares their hearts (Psa 10:17; 57:7; 108:1; 112:7), their thoughts (Prov 16:3), and their goings (Psa 37:23; 40:2). The Hebrew word *kuwn* is used in all of those passages. The same word is also sometimes used to refer to actions of men, such as getting “ready” or “preparing” oneself, or a meal, etc. (Gen 43:16,25; Exod 16:5; 19:11,15; 34:2; Josh 1:11; 4:4,8; 1 Kgs 5:18; 6:19), searching out a matter and “establishing” facts, or making “certain” of something (Deut 13:14; 17:4; 1 Sam 26:4). God also told Israel to “prepare” cities of refuge (Deut 19:3). Most importantly, God tells man to prepare his heart (1 Sam 7:3; 1 Chr 29:18; 2 Chr 12:14; 19:3; 20:33; 30:19; Ezra 7:10; Psa 78:8,37), his ways (2 Chr 27:6), and his words (Job 42:7-8) unto the Lord. The word is used in a very literal sense to describe the foundation or “standing” of a physical building (Judg 16:26,29).

If the Lord wills

To understand how the Hebrew word *kuwn* (or any other Bible word) is used in any particular passage, it is vital to closely study the context. An examination of Jeremiah 10:23 by itself opens up two possible meanings of the word “direct” in this verse. One possibility is that this verse is teaching the inability of man to do anything unless it is God’s will. This truth is definitely taught in several places in the scriptures. For example, Proverbs 16:9 says, “*A man’s heart devises his way: but the Lord directs his steps.*” “Directs” here is the same word as in Jeremiah 10:23 (*kuwn*). Man makes plans and devises what he wants to do or thinks he will do, but ultimately, only what God wills can actually happen. James 4:13-16 says, “*Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appears for*

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(continued)

a little time, and then vanishes away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.” We cannot even make ourselves be alive, let alone make ourselves be able to do “this or that.” Our plans so often do not work out. To not say, “if the Lord wills” is a form of evil boasting, because the Lord must direct man’s steps.

The right way to walk in

Nevertheless, although this principle is taught in God’s word, the context of Jeremiah 10:23 points in another direction, towards the issue of determining matters of right and wrong. An examination of the passage reveals that Judah was following the vain ways of the heathen. Judah had turned from Jehovah to idols (Jer 10:1-16). Therefore, God was going to sling them out of the land (Jer 10:17-20). God said the pastors had become brutish and had not sought the Lord (Jer 10:21). That is why God was going to send Babylon from the north to scatter the flock (Jer 10:21-22). In this context, God states that the way of man is not in himself and it is not in man that walks to direct his steps. Man does not have the right, nor the ability to guide himself spiritually. What *seems* right to a man will lead him to spiritual death (Prov 14:12; 16:25). Only God has the right, the authority, the wisdom, and the ability to establish the way that man should walk in. The following verses all teach this fact, and they all use the Hebrew word *kuwn*, which is italicized in each case to make it clear.

“Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways *be established*” (Prov 4:26). Established by whom? “The steps of a good man are *ordered* by the Lord, and he delights in his way” (Psa 37:23). The Lord must do this establishing or erecting. But it is a *good* man whose steps are directed by God. How? “O that my ways were *directed* to keep thy statutes” (Psa 119:5)! “*Order* my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me” (Psa 119:133). It is in God’s word that the Lord establishes the steps we should walk in! It is only in the holy scriptures that the Lord our God shows us “the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do” (Jer 42:3). God’s word is a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path” (Psa 119:105). Man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt 4:4; Luke 4:4). God’s word produces faith in God (Rom 10:17), begets us (1 Pet 1:23), sanctifies us (John 17:17), and perfects His love in us (1 John 2:5-6; 2 Tim 3:16-17). His word builds us up and is able to give us an eternal inheritance in heaven (Acts 20:32). God’s word will judge us on the last day (John 12:48; Jas 2:12), but that same word is able to save our souls (Jas 1:21), *if* we obey it (Heb 5:8-9). Judah, like so many people (including the young), was trying to do things their own way. But if we walk in the ways of our own heart, and in the sight of our own eyes, we will be judged by God for it (Eccl 11:9). Therefore, we must put away all evil from us (Eccl 11:10). This is what God was teaching Judah to do in Jeremiah 10:23, but Judah was not listening. Will we?