

Item: In Israel, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon suffers a massive brain hemorrhage that leaves him in a persistent coma. The political career—if not the life—of this warrior for peace is abruptly over.

Item: The Palestinians hold their first-ever election—and give majority power to Hamas, one of the most vicious, hate-filled terrorist groups in the world bent on the literal (not just political) annihilation of the state of Israel.

Item: In the United States, the Senate finally confirms the second of two conservative judges nominated by President Bush for the Supreme Court. The highest court in the land is now just one justice away from being solidly conservative.

Item: Around the world, but especially in the Middle East, the United States and her allies continue their fight against radical Islamists—a fight that has been waged by the other side for decades, but only seriously joined by the west after September 11, 2001.

“Good or Bad”

fOR EACH HISTORICAL EVENT LISTED ABOVE there are those who consider it good, and those who consider it bad. Ask an Israeli about the loss of Sharon, then ask a Palestinian. For that matter, ask acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, then ask Binyamin Netanyahu. Ask a Palestinian about Hamas’ victory, then ask an Israeli. Or just stay in Gaza and ask the current leader of the defeated Fatah party and Palestinian Chairman, Mahmoud Abbas.

Ask a conservative Republican about the additions of Chief Justice John Roberts and Associate Justice Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court, then ask a liberal Democrat. Boy, will you get two different answers. And, while you are at it, ask those same two Americans their opinion about the world-wide fight against Islamo-terrorism—specifically its front line in Iraq. Then stand back.

And every person so queried could be absolutely wrong.

unanticipated outcome

Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you

have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die.” So Nathan went to his house. Then the Lord struck the child that Uriah’s widow bore to David, so that he was very sick. David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground. But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead; so David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?” And they said, “He is dead.”

2 Samuel 12:13-16,19

Just about everyone thinks they know what is good and what is bad. But just about everyone can be wrong about that. Did King David think it would be a good thing for the life of an innocent baby to be spared? Certainly. Did he consider it bad that God did not grant his request, and that his and Bathsheba’s child died? Probably so. But for millennia believers have been not only informed, but edified by his righteous response.

So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself,

and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate.

2 Samuel 12:20

Did the Marys mourning beneath the cross of Jesus believe with all their heart that His death would be not just a bad, but terrible, horrible tragedy? No doubt. But His death was the perfect answer to man's sin, and has meant eternal life with God for millions. And today, even modern "sacrifices" still occur. Many years ago a friend of ours learned of his mother's untimely death. She had been found dead in her driveway, and, sadly, had been there for some time. It was a horrible, traumatic loss for him. But because of his mother's death, our friend, in his grief, passed through a hard time of self-examination—particularly his relationship with the God who took her life. As a result, our friend and his wife accepted Christ as their Savior.

by faith

We often can know with certainty what is right and what is wrong, for God's word is our source document for such things. But rarely can we know with certainty what is good and what is bad. This we must leave in the hands of our all-knowing, all-powerful God, for He alone knows both the passing and ultimate consequences of decisions and events here on earth.

This is what is meant by the prophet Habakkuk when he writes God's words, in his oft-quoted declaration,

"Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith."
Habakkuk 2:4

And here is how this truth is played out in real life:

Though the fig tree should not blossom
And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail
And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold
And there be no cattle in the stalls,
Yet I will exult in the Lord,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.
The Lord God is my strength,
And He has made my feet like hinds' feet,
And makes me walk on my high places.

Habakkuk 3:17-19a

Since we are not equipped to know whether events and decisions are ultimately good or bad, we must live *by faith*. Faith that God knows what He is doing.

Today's "good" may turn as sour in our belly as last night's chili, and today's "bad" just may turn for our benefit on the morrow. We cannot know, and if we truly live by that which we profess—namely, God is sovereign—then we will not waste time worrying about it. He alone knows the *why* behind His sovereign decisions.

sovereign God

Something "bad" certainly happened to old King Nebuchadnezzar. One day, against the advice of his trusted counselor, Daniel, he was

strutting about his balcony feeling mighty proud, I say mighty proud of all his accomplishments.

"The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?'"

Daniel 4:30

He considered everything lying at his feet to be "good." But God did not agree. Just as Daniel had foretold a year earlier, God reached down and caused something "bad" to happen to the arrogant king.

"While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.' Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws."

Daniel 4:31-33

During those "seven periods" Nebuchadnezzar had plenty of time to consider his situation, and the humanity in him must have cried out, shaking its fist against a God who would do such a terrible thing to him. But by the end, his mind got right; the king understood that what he had seen as good was really bad, and what he had first thought to be bad, had turned for his good. And here was the result:

"But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever;

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
And His kingdom endures from generation to generation.
All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
But He does according to His will in the host of heaven
And among the inhabitants of earth;
And no one can ward off His hand
Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'

"At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."

Daniel 4:34-37

Black clouds may be filled with God's life-giving rain. Silver-lined clouds may be orchestrated for deceit by Satan. We cannot know. Nor should we *try* to know. God is sovereign, and "the righteous will live by his faith." 