

How the Gospel came to Melita

“And when they had escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.” (Acts 28:1)

Melita, also known as Malta, is a small island in the Mediterranean Sea between Sicily and Africa. It is only 18 miles long and 8 miles wide. Generally barren and unproductive, the eastern half did produce some olive oil, wool, and other commodities.

The chief man on the island during the days of Paul was Publius. His father was sick with a bloody dysentery. Many other people on the island were also sick. No one there had heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Many miles away a ship of Adramyttium was searching for a winter's harbor. Paul, who was on that ship, thought they should spend the winter in the port of Lasea. The owner of the ship, and the centurion in charge of Paul, preferred a haven of Crete known as Phenice. God, however, had other plans for them!

When the south wind blew softly they weighed anchor and set sail for Phenice. They never made it! A violent storm blew them “off course.” In retrospect, however, the ship was not “off course” at all. It was going precisely where the Sovereign of the Universe wanted it to go.

This fact was later revealed to Paul by an angel. The angel informed him that there would be no loss of life, only of the ship. They were, however, to be “cast upon a certain island.” We now know that island was the Island of Melita.

The ship was “off course” until the storm put it back on track. It was the thoughts of man that were “off course.” The storm was used by God to take the ship precisely where God wanted it to go. It was not directed by man for they had seen neither sun nor stars for many days (Acts 27:20.) This means that the men had no way of knowing where they were or plotting a course where they wanted to go. The sails were also down and thus they were powerless to change their course even if they had wanted to. They feared they would be “driven” by the storm to the quicksands of North Africa, but God was “driving” them somewhere else. He had plans for them to arrive at a “certain island.”

The Psalmist recognized that it is God who raises the stormy seas of life. It is God who causes the seamen to reel to and fro, stagger like drunken men, and come to their wits' end. It is God who orchestrates our lives so that we cry unto Him for help. When we are sufficiently humbled, He brings us out of our distresses and calms the stormy seas. Then He brings us into our desired haven. (See Psalm 107:23-31.)

In retrospect we see that the ship arrived “on time.” The men of Melita built a fire and provided them with a warm welcome. God was in control and everything was working together for good. God even transformed a snake bite into a positive witness for the proclamation of the Gospel. The father of Publius was healed, as well as many others on that “certain island.”

Three months later they would depart for Rome in a ship of Alexandria. This ship had spent the winter there. Paul was given many honours and the men of Melita laded them with all necessary supplies.

We now know that the Gospel did not come to Melita by accident. The Gospel came to Melita because God ordained it to. God could have used prophetic utterances, or visions, to lead Paul there as He did on other occasions. This time, however, He chose to use a storm!

Now let us pause for a moment and consider the working of God in our own lives. We know in our hearts that nothing happens to us by accident. “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28.)

What “we know” can buoy us up when we are down. It can lead us from the stormy sea into our desired haven.

If there is a storm in your life, please consider that God may be using it to bring you to a certain place where you can preach the Gospel to those in need!