

# Acts 27:42

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

## Analysis

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This verse captures a pivotal moment in Paul's shipwreck narrative, revealing the brutal pragmatism of Roman military culture. The Greek word **βουλή** (boulē, 'counsel' or 'plan') indicates a deliberate, strategic decision rather than a spontaneous reaction. The soldiers' proposal to kill the prisoners reflects their accountability under Roman law—guards who allowed prisoners to escape faced execution themselves (Acts 12:19). The phrase **μή τις ἐκκολυμβήσας διαφύγη** (mē tis ekkolymbēsas diaphygē, 'lest anyone swimming out should escape') shows their fear of capital punishment for dereliction of duty.

This cruel calculus stands in stark contrast to the centurion Julius's protective intervention in the next verse. The term **δεσμώτας** (desmōtas, 'prisoners') emphasizes their bound, helpless state, making the soldiers' plan even more ruthless. Paul's earlier prophecy that all would survive (Acts 27:22-25) now hangs in the balance, demonstrating God's sovereignty even over military decisions in crisis situations. The tension between human self-preservation instincts and divine purposes creates a powerful narrative moment where God's word must overcome human fear and institutional violence. This verse illustrates how God's promises often face opposition from worldly systems and human reasoning.

## Historical Context

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Roman military law was exceptionally strict regarding prisoner custody. The Justinian Code codified what was already standard practice: guards who allowed

prisoners to escape would receive the punishment that prisoner was destined to receive. This explains the soldiers' extreme response—they preferred to kill prisoners rather than risk their own execution for negligence. The shipwreck occurred around 60 AD during Paul's voyage to Rome for trial before Caesar. The 276 people aboard (Acts 27:37) included Roman soldiers, sailors, prisoners, and passengers. Swimming to shore was feasible—they were near Malta—but the violent storm and nighttime conditions made it dangerous. The centurion's authority to overrule the soldiers' counsel demonstrates the command hierarchy even in crisis situations.

## Related Passages

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**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

## Study Questions

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1. How do the soldiers' counsel reveal the harsh realities of Roman military justice?
2. What does this verse teach about human self-preservation instincts versus God's protective purposes?
3. How did the centurion's intervention fulfill Paul's prophecy that all would be saved?
4. What parallels exist between the prisoners' helpless situation and humanity's spiritual condition?
5. How does this crisis moment demonstrate God's sovereignty over both natural disasters and human decisions?

## Interlinear Text

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τῶν δὲ στρατιωτῶν βουλή ἐγένετο ἵνα τοὺς δεσμώτας  
G3588 **And** **the soldiers** **counsel** **was** **to** G3588 **the prisoners**  
G1161 G4757 G1012 G1096 G2443 G1202

ἀποκτείνωσιν μή τις ἐκκολυμβήσας διαφύγοι  
**kill** **lest** **any of them** **should swim out** **and escape**  
G615 G3361 G5100 G1579 G1309

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