Given the importance of following the law for Matthew (especially as seen in 5:17-20 and in the Antitheses), if we had no indication that Christianity spread among non-Jews soon after Jesus’ death, we might simply assume that Matthew’s community was comprised of Jews who continued to adhere to the law even if they disagreed with the Pharisees over how best to do so. But Gentiles *were* joining the Christian church well before Matthew wrote his Gospel; indeed, at this time there were probably more Gentiles who claimed to be followers of Jesus than Jews. Does Matthew think that these Gentiles Christians are to keep kosher, to observe the sabbath, and, if male, to be circumcised? It is an intriguing question because, as we will see in a later post, the apostle Paul was adamant that they should *not*.

It is unfortunate for us that Matthew does not address this issue directly. In this Gospel Jesus does give numerous indications that Gentiles will become his followers and inherit the kingdom of heaven; but nowhere does he indicate whether or not any of these converts will be required to be circumcised or to keep sabbath or to keep Jewish food laws. Consider one of the most dramatic statements concerning the heirs of the kingdom to come from Jesus’ lips, a statement in response to a Roman (non-Jewish) centurion’s trust in his powers:

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