

After his 70-page introduction to the history of first-century Palestine, which I enjoyed, even if it was skewed to set up his thesis of Jesus as another-one-of-those-zealots, Aslan sets the stage for his entire discussion of the historical Jesus, in Part II, with his Prologue, “Zeal for your House.” Aslan sees the set of stories relates in this chapter as paradigmatic for understanding Jesus’ message and mission. As he says, this story, “more than any other word or deed, helps reveal who Jesus was and what Jesus meant.... So revelatory is this single moment in Jesus’s brief life that it alone can be used to clarify his mission, his theology, his politics, his relationship to the Jewish authorities, his relationship to Judaism in general, and his attitude toward the Roman occupation” (p. 73).

Wow. That’s a lot. The story he chooses is actually a collection of stories having to do with Jesus’ final trip to Jerusalem: these stories include (a) The Triumphal Entry; (b) The Cleansing of the Temple; and (c) the Question about Paying Tribute to Caesar; and (d) Jesus final arrest and crucifixion. Through these stories Aslan wants to demonstrate that Jesus is best understood as a nationalistic Jewish zealot – that is, someone who favors the violent overthrow of the Roman oppressors so as to allow Israel once again to rule its own Promised Land. In this chapter Aslan claims that Jesus was not “a violent revolutionary bent on armed rebellion,” but in other parts of his book it becomes clear that even if Jesus was not “bent on” an armed rebellion, that’s what he wanted – the political and military overthrow of the Roman overlords. As such he was an insurgent – sometimes called a “bandit”; the Greek word is *lestes*, which means something like an armed guerilla soldier.

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