

Yesterday I pointed out some of the features of Reza Aslan's Zealot that I found to be commendable. In the next series of posts, starting with today's, I'll be pointing out the problems. There are lots of them. Some readers of the blog have objected to my (repeatedly, I'll grant) pointing out that Aslan is not an expert. Now I'll try to show why that is both obvious and unfortunate. There are mistakes scattered throughout the book. I'd say 1/3 to 1/2 of the pages in my copy have bright yellow large question marks on them, where (when highlighting) I found factual errors, misstatements, dubious claims, inconsistencies of logic, and so on. I obviously am not going to provide a full list here. In today's post I'll begin by mentioning some of the raw, factual mistakes. These are only from his Part I; I'll probably provide some more in a subsequent post, from other Parts of the book in order to round out the picture a bit (There are other kinds of problems I'll note in later posts - including mistakes about the New Testament, his primary source of information about the historical Jesus.)

But for now, here are some mistaken historical statements. Some may strike you as picayune, but some of them matter. And there are a lot of them; one wonders why they're there at all. In each case I'll cite his claim and then explain the problem.

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- Claim: After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, the Jews were "exiled from the land" (p. xxix). This isn't true. The Jews were not exiled from the land of Palestine by the Romans.
- Claim: Legions of Roman troops were stationed throughout Judea. This is not right. The legions were kept up in Syria. (By saying they were stationed throughout Judea Aslan makes it sound as if Jews were constantly confronted with Roman soldiers. In fact they weren't. The governor had some troops with him in Caesarea. Otherwise there were not Roman soldiers everywhere - let alone legions!)

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