

I begin my assessment of Reza Aslan's [Zealot](#) by saying a few things about what I appreciate about the book. In subsequent posts I will talk about the mistakes that pervade it, and about my view of the overarching thesis that Jesus was principally a zealot in favor of a violent insurrection against the Romans.

But first, the positives. As everyone has said, over and over again, the book is extremely well written. It reads more like a novel than a historical reconstruction - it flows very well on the sentence level, it tells a gripping narrative in a gripping fashion, and I appreciate very much the narrative structure of the book. Aslan is an expert in creative writing - it's his day job - and unlike others who teach a subject (such as writing) but cannot do it, he himself has the gift.

I appreciate very much the historical focus of the book. This is its outstanding quality. More than most non-experts who try to write a book about Jesus, Aslan is intent and determined to situate Jesus in his own historical context. That in fact is the overarching theme of the book: Jesus cannot be understood outside the historical, social, and political realities of first-century Palestine. That is why Aslan spends so much of his time on these matters. Some readers may think its overkill, to give us this much information about the political plight of Palestinian Jews and their active resistance to foreign domination; but it's the point of the entire book and completely welcome from my perspective. (Some readers have wondered if there is something else driving this concern; is there, in the back of Aslan's mind - or even in the front of it - a question of the situation of *modern* Palestinians and their unjust treatment by a far more powerful oppressor who has taken over their land? I have absolutely NO way to answer that question; I don't know a single thing about Aslan's political views)

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