

I have promised for some time to make some comments on Reza Aslan's bestselling reconstruction of the historical Jesus: [Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth](#). And now the time is come. As I've indicated in my earlier posts, I had my first-year students in my seminar "Jesus in Scholarship and Film" read the book and make an evaluation of it. Most of the students thought very highly of it. In particular they thought it was unusually well written and that it made an interesting case for its thesis that Jesus was a politically motivated zealot who believed in the violent overthrow of the Roman empire, or at least believed that the Romans should be driven out of the Promised Land, as did so many others in his time and place. (Aslan does not argue that Jesus was a member of the Zealot party; he realizes that this party did not arise until after Jesus' death.)

I have already made a couple of comments about the book that I felt safe in saying without having read it, and now that I have read it, I stand by them both. (1) In response to a question about whether Aslan was a recognized scholar in the field of NT or early Christian studies, I indicated that he is not - and does not claim to be. He teaches creative writing and as one might suspect, he is indeed a highly talented writer. And he's smart. And for a lay person venturing into a field other than his own expertise, he has read a lot. Not as much as he should have, but still, it's a lot and it's impressive that he has done as much reading as he has. But no, he is decidedly not a scholar in the field. More on that later. (But for now, let me stress what I indicated in my earlier post: his lack of scholarly credentials does NOT disqualify him from writing an interesting and informed book.) (2) His basic thesis about who Jesus was (a zealot, obviously), has been floated for over three hundred years, and has never seemed convincing to the majority of experts, or even a large minority of experts, or even a, well reasonable minority of experts. That doesn't make it wrong! But my point is simply that it's not a new thesis, although Aslan does not acknowledge his predecessors and the responses to them by others who weren't convinced.

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