

I have spent considerable time showing just how problematic Reza Aslan's view of Jesus is, as he set it forth in his bestselling [Zealot](#). But it is not enough to attack someone else's position if you don't agree with it. You also have to have an alternative that is more attractive. So it's time to move into that realm.

As I have repeatedly stated on this blog, the view of Jesus that has dominated scholarship since the classic of Albert Schweitzer in 1906, [The Quest of the Historical Jesus](#) (actually, it was in German, with the title, [Von Reimarus zu Wrede](#), which, frankly, is not nearly as catchy...), is that Jesus is best understood to have been - as were many of his contemporaries - a Jewish apocalypticist, one who believed that God was soon to intervene in history in a spectacular and cosmic way to overthrow the forces of evil in a supernatural show of power, and bring in a good kingdom on earth in which there would be no more injustice and oppression and poverty, no more pain, misery, or suffering. This would not happen through political revolt but through a divine display of cosmic power. And it would all happen soon - within Jesus' own generation.

I have pointed out that Aslan does not ever explain what his criteria are for determining whether a tradition of Jesus is historical or not. In my book on Jesus ([Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium](#)) I deal at length with historical criteria; I have dealt with them before on this blog and so won't go into them now. But I will say this: as historians utilizing the Gospels as historical sources, if one wants to know what actually goes back to the historical Jesus, among other things one looks at the earliest sources available and tries to find patterns that permeate all of these sources. The earliest sources are Mark (our earliest Gospel), Q (the sayings source shared by Matthew and Luke, and usually dated at least as early as Mark), M (the source for Matthew's special material), and L (the source for Luke's).

Aslan's idea that Jesus may have been a zealot interested in the political overthrow of the Romans by a show of force in which Israel would be established as a nation by use of the sword is based on very scanty evidence - a hint there, a hard to explain detail there, in one source or another - as I have already pointed out. These hints and details do indeed need to be explained. But there is no way at all that they dominate the early tradition. Not even close. The idea that Jesus proclaimed a cosmic, supernatural, intervention of God (rather than a political revolution), on the other hand, is all over the place, abundantly attested precisely in our earliest sources. It is, in fact, in all of them.

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