In response both to my thread on Judas and to my post on Barabbas from last week, a number of readers have asked or suggested that the stories about both figures may be explained on the hypothesis that Jesus was indeed a kind of insurrectionist who supported an armed rebellion against Rome. That would explain possibly why Judas turned on him, and why he is treated equally to Barabbas, himself guilty of murder during an attempted insurrection.

I have dealt with the issue on the blog, but it has been many years now. The first time I addressed it at any length (in 2013!) was in response to the then recently-published book *Zealot* by Reza Aslan. This was the first book about Jesus ever to become the Number One bestseller on the NYTimes bestseller list, and back then lots and lots of people had been reading it.

It is a brilliantly written book: Aslan is a professor of creative writing. He is smart, creative, and knows how to spin fine narrative. But even though he has a degree in religious studies, he does not have advanced degrees in New Testament, or biblical studies, Jewish studies, classics, or anything connected with religion in antiquity.

The thesis of his book is that Jesus was indeed in support of a violent revolution against Rome — not, say, a preacher of love of enemy and peace among all, or a simple rabbinic-like interpreter of Torah, or an apocalyptic prophet expecting God to intervene soon in the world, or anything else. He was zealous for the Promised Land and wanted Jews to take it back, by force if necessary. That’s what got him killed.

I devoted a rather long thread to evaluating the book, from the perspective of scholarship on the NT, ancient Judaism, the Roman world, etc. (just search for his name on the blog and you’ll see). Even though I appreciated the creativity and the writing of the book, I found it problematic; I devoted a number of posts to the flat-out mistakes it makes (with respect to the Roman world, Judaism at the time, the New Testament, etc.) Then I eventually got around to the central thesis. Was Jesus in support of a violent overthrow of Rome?

Here I’ll repost some of the things I said back then, to give my answer to the question, in light of Aslan’s thesis. You will not need to have read (or even know about) his book to make sense of what I say here.

I have not completed my evaluation of Reza Aslan’s popular, interesting, and well-written account of Jesus, *Zealot*. One could think that Aslan may have gotten this, that, or the other fact wrong — about the Roman world, about Judaism, about the Gospels, about the historical Jesus - but that his overarching thesis is nonetheless intact and compelling. And so now I want to address the thesis itself, that Jesus is best understood as a political revolutionary intent on the military overthrow of Rome – or at least the expulsion of Rome from the Promised Land and the establishment of a sovereign state of Israel, all to be done by force.

As I have stressed early on in this series of posts, this is not a new thesis. It was in fact the very first thesis ...

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