Did Jesus support of an armed uprising against Rome? Yesterday I re-posted some comments I had made years ago on the blog about Aslan’s popular book *Zealot*, which advances that thesis. I won’t be dealing with the entire book this time around: I’m just interested at this point in dealing with this vital question itself

Now I want to show how two data that are crucial for the “zealot hypothesis” actually make better sense with this apocalyptic understanding of Jesus. The two data involve the temple cleansing and the crucifixion itself.

If one wants to establish – as Aslan very much does want to do – that Jesus favored violence, there is no better scene to focus on than the disruption he caused in the Temple upon arriving in Jerusalem in the last week of his life. According to the earliest accounts, Jesus enters the temple, overturns the tables of those exchanging money, and drives out those who were selling sacrificial animals. In our first account, Mark’s, Jesus actually shuts down the operation of the entire temple.

The problem with using this as evidence for the historical Jesus himself is that, as critical scholars have long argued, Mark’s account simply cannot be accurate, in a literal sense, but is at best massively exaggerated. How could it be right that Jesus not only overturned the moneychangers’ tables and drove out those selling sacrificial animals, but also shut down the entire Temple cult?

The Temple precincts were *enormous*. Within the walls of the Temple you could fit 25 American football fields. How exactly did Jesus stop all the activities in the Temple? Are we to imagine that Jesus pulled this off by himself? (Aslan indicates that his disciples were helping pull it off – but that’s not what any of our sources indicate.) Moreover, it is important to note this time of year — during the Passover Festival — is precisely when the Roman prefect Pilate came to Jerusalem with troops that he stationed at pressure points — most especially the temple (as we know from the historian Josephus) in order to squash any unrest of any kind. If Jesus had caused this kind of ruckus he would have been arrested on the spot. Are we supposed to think he simply vanished into thin air?

True, it is almost certain that something happened at the Temple. But what was it? The best explanation – the one that has been most influential among scholars for the past 40 years or so – is ...

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