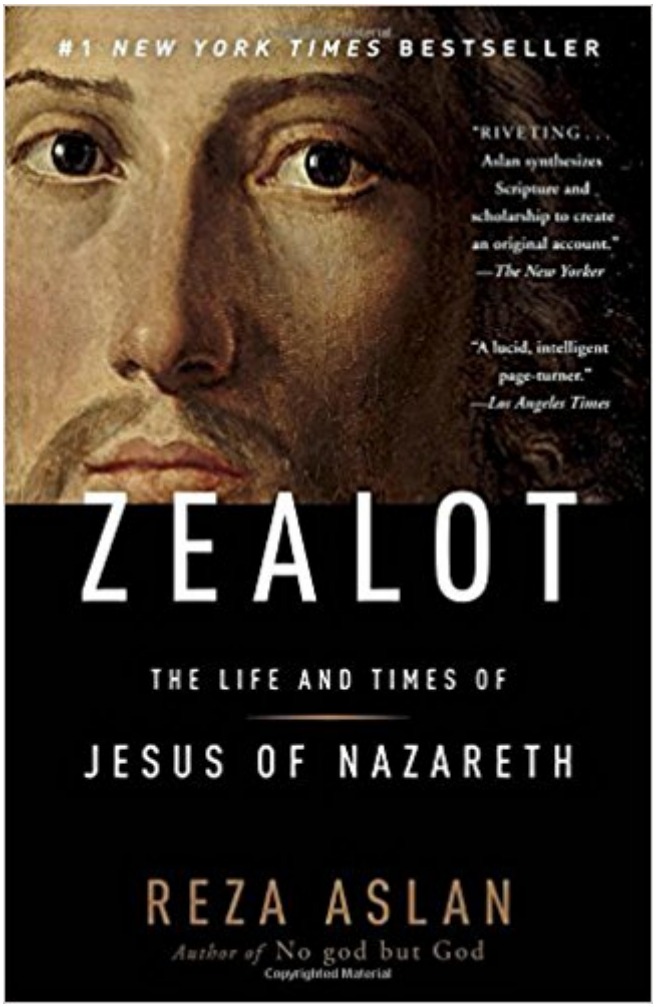
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Zealot: The Life And Times Of Jesus Of Nazareth



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Synopsis

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER Ã¢â ¬Â¢ Ã¢â ¬Å“A lucid, intelligent page-turnerÃ¢â ¬Â• (Los Angeles Times) that challenges long-held assumptions about Jesus, from the host of Believer Ã Â Two thousand years ago, an itinerant Jewish preacher walked across the Galilee, gathering followers to establish what he called the Ã¢â ¬Å“Kingdom of God.Ã¢â ¬Â• The revolutionary movement he launched was so threatening to the established order that he was executed as a state criminal. Within decades after his death, his followers would call him God. Ã Â Sifting through centuries of mythmaking, Reza Aslan sheds new light on one of historyÃ¢â ¬â„¢s most enigmatic figures by examining Jesus through the lens of the tumultuous era in which he lived. Balancing the Jesus of the Gospels against the historical sources, Aslan describes a man full of conviction and passion, yet rife with contradiction. He explores the reasons the early Christian church preferred to promulgate an image of Jesus as a peaceful spiritual teacher rather than a politically conscious revolutionary. And he grapples with the riddle of how Jesus understood himself, the mystery that is at the heart of all subsequent claims about his divinity. Ã Â Zealot yields a fresh perspective on one of the greatest stories ever told even as it affirms the radical and transformative nature of JesusÃ¢â ¬â„¢ life and mission. Ã Â Praise for Zealot Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Riveting . . . Aslan synthesizes Scripture and scholarship to create an original account.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The New Yorker Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Fascinatingly and convincingly drawn . . . Aslan may come as close as one can to respecting those who revere Jesus as the peace-loving, turn-the-other-cheek, true son of God depicted in modern Christianity, even as he knocks down that image.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The Seattle Times Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“[AslanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s] literary talent is as essential to the effect of Zealot as are his scholarly and journalistic chops. . . . A vivid, persuasive portrait.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Salon Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“This tough-minded, deeply political book does full justice to the real Jesus, and honors him in the process.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •San Francisco Chronicle Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“A special and revealing work, one that believer and skeptic alike will find surprising, engaging, and original.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Jon Meacham, Pulitzer PrizeÃ¢â ¬â œwinning author of Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Compulsively readable . . . This superb work is highly recommended.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Publishers Weekly (starred review)

Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks; Reprint edition (September 9, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0812981480

ISBN-13: 978-0812981483

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 7.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 4,862 customer reviews

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Customer Reviews

Q&A with Reza Aslan Q. Why did you title your biography of Jesus of Nazareth Zealot? A. In Jesus' world, zealot referred to those Jews who adhered to a widely accepted biblical doctrine called zeal. These Ã¢â ¬Å“zealousÃ¢â ¬Â• Jews were strict nationalists who preached the sole sovereignty of God. They wanted to throw off the yoke of Roman occupation and cleanse the Promised Land of all foreign elements. Some zealots resorted to extreme acts of violence against both the Roman authorities and the Jewish Ã¢â ¬Ëœcollaborators,Ã¢â ¬Â• by which they meant the wealthy Temple priests and the Jewish aristocracy. Others refrained from violence but were no less adamant about establishing the reign of God on earth. There is no evidence that Jesus of Nazareth was himself a violent revolutionary (though his views on the use of violence were more complex than it is often assumed). However, JesusÃ¢â ¬â„¢ actions and his teachings about the Kingdom of God clearly indicate that he was a follower of the zealot doctrine, which is why he, like so many zealots before and after him, was ultimately executed by Rome for the crime of sedition. Q. Yours is one of the few popular biographies of Jesus of Nazareth that does not rely on the gospels as your primary source of information for uncovering JesusÃ¢â ¬â„¢ life. Why is that? What are your primary sources? A. I certainly rely on the gospels to provide a narrative outline to my biography of Jesus of Nazareth, but my primary source in recreating JesusÃ¢â ¬â„¢ life are historical writings about first century Palestine, like the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, as well as Roman documents of the time. The gospels are incredible texts that provide Christians with a profound framework for living a life in imitation of Christ. The problem, however, is that the gospels are not, nor were they ever meant to be, historical documentations of JesusÃ¢â ¬â„¢ life. These are not eyewitness accounts of JesusÃ¢â ¬â„¢ words and deeds. They are testimonies of faith composed by communities of faith written many years after the events they describe. In other words, the

gospels tell us about Jesus the Christ, not Jesus the man. The gospels are of course extremely useful in revealing how the early Christians viewed Jesus. But they do not tell us much about how Jesus viewed himself. To get to the bottom of that mystery, which is what I try to do in the book, one must sift through the gospel stories to analyze their claims about Jesus in light of the historical facts we know about the time and world in which Jesus lived. Indeed, I believe that if we place Jesus firmly within the social, religious, and political context of the era in which he lived, then, in some ways, his biography writes itself. Q. You write in the book that you became an evangelical Christian in High School, but that after a few years, you abandoned Christianity and returned to the faith of your forefathers: Islam. Why did you decide to make this change and how did it affect how you understood the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth. A. When I was fifteen years old I heard the gospel story for the first time and immediately accepted Jesus into my heart. I had what Christians refer to as Ã¢â ¬Å“an encounter with Christ.Ã¢â ¬Â• I spent the next five years as an evangelical Christian, and even spent some time traveling around the United States spreading the gospel message. But the more I read the Bible Ã¢â ¬â œ especially in college, where I began my formal study of the New Testament Ã¢â ¬â œ the more I uncovered a wide chasm between the Jesus of history and the Jesus I learned about in church. At that same time, through the encouragement of one of my professors, I began to reexamine the faith and traditions of my forefathers and returned to Islam. But the irony is that once I detached my academic study of Jesus from my faith in Christ, I became an even more fervent follower of Jesus of Nazareth. What I mean to say is that I live my life according to the social teachings preached by Jesus two thousand years ago. I take his actions against the powers of his time and his defense of the poor and the weak as a model of behavior for myself. I pray, as a Muslim, alongside my Christian wife, and together we teach our children the values I believe Jesus represents. The man who defied the will of the most powerful empire the world had ever known Ã¢â ¬â œ and lost Ã¢â ¬â œ is so much more real to me than the Jesus I knew as a Christian. So in a way, this book is my attempt to spread the good news of Jesus the man with the same passion that I once applied to spreading the good news of Jesus the Christ. Q. What do you hope readers, especially religious readers, take away from your book? A. My hope is that this book provides readers with a more complete sense of the world in which Jesus lived. We cannot truly understand JesusÃ¢â ¬â„¢ words and deeds if we separate them from the religious and political context of his time. Regardless of whether you think of Jesus as a prophet, a teacher, or God incarnate, it is important to remember that he did not live in a vacuum. Whatever else Jesus was, he was, without question, a man of his time. This is true for all of us. The key to understanding who Jesus was and what Jesus meant lies in understanding the times in which he lived.

ThatÃ¢â ¬â„¢s what this book does. It drops you in the middle of JesusÃ¢â ¬â„¢ world and helps you understand the context out of which he arose and in which preached. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Starred Review. The person and work of Jesus of Nazareth has been a topic of constant interest since he lived and died some 2,000 years ago. Much speculation about who he was and what he taught has led to confusion and doubt. Aslan, who authored the much acclaimed No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam, offers a compelling argument for a fresh look at the Nazarene, focusing on how Jesus the man evolved into Jesus the Christ. Approaching the subject from a purely academic perspective, the author parts an important curtain that has long hidden from view the man Jesus, who is every bit as compelling, charismatic, and praiseworthy as Jesus the Christ. Carefully comparing extra-biblical historical records with the New Testament accounts, Aslan develops a convincing and coherent story of how the Christian church, and in particular Paul, reshaped Christianity's essence, obscuring the very real man who was Jesus of Nazareth. Compulsively readable and written at a popular level, this superb work is highly recommended. Agent: Elyse Cheney, Elyse Cheney Literary Associates (July) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I've read the book (unlike so many of the "reviewers" who gave it one star) and here are some points.1) This is a popularization of recent (late 20th-early 21st century) reputable scholarship regarding Jesus. There's nothing in this book that would surprise a person (like myself) who has read pretty much all of the accessible scholarship on Jesus published in the last 30 or so years. Just going through the (extensive!) notes and bibliography at the end indicates to me that Aslan has done his homework.2) Aslan takes the position that Jesus was a zealot for God and God's Temple, but (and this is repeated several times in the book) he was not a member of the Zealot Party, which wouldn't arise until over 30 years after Jesus' death. In this, Jesus was just one of a number of people who arose in the period from the reign of Herod the Great to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and his fate was like those others. In short, Jesus was killed for his zealotry, which was perceived as a threat to the Roman authorities and particularly to the Jewish sycophants who ran the Temple (and profited nicely from it). This is not a position shared by many members of the religious scholarship fraternity, who have attempted to carve out a position for Jesus where he's a religious figure who did not delve at all into politics. It's an interesting argument that I can't do justice in a few short sentences. If you're interested, you'll have to read the book yourself and decide if

Aslan makes his case.3) Aslan doesn't stop with the death of Jesus, and, as someone writing history, not hagiography, he carefully notes that he can't pass judgment on whether Jesus' resurrection occurred, because it is not a historical event but an event of faith. He then pushes on to a discussion of the earliest Christians and, in particular, the conflict between James the Just, described as the brother of Jesus and the head of the Jerusalem Christians, and Paul of Tarsus, the evangelizer of the Gentile world. This part is definitely worth the read, because it brings out the fact that the early Christians were not "in one accord" but were in fact fractiously divided over what Jesus taught and what it all meant.4) My only serious factual gripe about the book comes from the first paragraph of Chapter 15, where Aslan describes James the Just as follows: "He himself owned nothing, not even the clothes he wore--simple garments made of linen, not wool." The problem is that historically linen was an elite fabric, not the fabric of the poor. (For example, Luke 16:19 points out that the rich man in Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus wore purple and fine linen and all four gospels are agreed that Jesus was buried in linen.) Making linen from flax took a lot of preparation as compared to wool, which can be spun practically straight from the sheep. But getting back to James the Just: The sources, by putting James in linen, were more likely comparing James to the Temple High Priest, who would have worn linen for the sacrifices.5) I'm knocking off one star for not being footnoted. Granted, there is an extensive set of chapter-based endnotes (and I strongly suggest reading them, they're as engaging as the book itself), but the lack of footnotes is a serious flaw. Even if the book is intended for a popular audience, it should have been footnoted.6) As for the assertion that the book is fatally flawed because it's influenced by Aslan's Muslim background: That is flatly false. Let me state again that there is nothing in this book that can't be read in the scholarship done by *Christians* published over the past several decades. Moreover, if Aslan was pushing Islam, you'd think that he'd make a point of saying, "Well, Islam considers Jesus a prophet," but he doesn't. Not at all. The reviews which make the assertion that the book is terrible, horrible and awful because of "OOOOH EVIL ISLAM!!!!" appear to have been influenced by Fox News' promotion of a screed by John Dickerson. As a former journalist for Phoenix New Times, Dickerson should know better, but perhaps that's why Dickerson is no longer a journalist but now pastors a church in Prescott, AZ and churning out inaccurate and inflammatory junk for the fearful faithful.

I read this book primarily because some of the negative reviews were so hysterical in their fear that I was curious what the big deal is. I still am.I am an ordained pastor with 15 years experience and five advanced degrees in theology. Aslan writes like what he is, a religious historian. His job as an academic is to present a thesis, develop it based on both evidence and his theories of meaning and

then let the reading community judge it. He does this well. This is a good and thoughtful book. I disagree with some of Aslan's conclusions. His thesis makes sense but it is not without problems. And at times his writing became tedious.Nonetheless, I give it four stars because it is an honest book from a gifted scholar that engaged me in a new way of thinking about the topic.That the author is a Muslim matters to me about as much as the fact that I as a reader am a Preabyterian matters to him. He is a scholar. That is what matters here.

Not much new here; much of what is discussed was known or proposed over 30 years ago in cutting- edge circles of NT studies. Where are the footnotes to primary sources? There is a vague essay on secondary writers who influenced the writer, and that is all. All that said, if this brings some of the material to a wider audience and counters the evangelical scare tactics and anti-intellectualism, that is a good thing.Even better: Albert Nolan, Jesus Before Christianity, 1992.With all these kinds of Jesus studies for the layperson, we need footnotes to track what conclusions are considered by scholars to be valid (still) and what have been discredited. This author is very definite but asks us just to accept the conclusions. Common to his book and Nolan's: Jesus as affirmatively for the poor of his community; importance of the mysterious use of "Son of Man," brutality of the Romans versus anti Jewish redactions by early church, and as to the resurrection...both authors agree it is critically important, but Nolan, a Dominican, is more skeptical than Aslan, a Muslim!Probably this popular title would have gained much less attention were it not for the conteoversy picked up by the popular press.

Reza Aslan has written a fascinating, extensively researched yet readable account of the beginnings of the Christian faith. Using historical, rather than theological, documents he clearly describes an extremely turbulent time together with the main characters. Many Christians will find this to be a controversial study, it certainly gave me pause in several places, as it brings into question the inerrancy of the Bible. This should not stop you from reading the boo

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