

## Palestine 1936: The Great Revolt and the Roots of the Middle East Conflict

**Oren Kessler**

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Oren Kessler's brave new history book *Palestine 1936* reveals the deep roots of today's Israel-Palestine conflict.

A tragic history shared with the hindsight knowledge of the decades of violence and bloodshed in the region that followed its events, the book begins in the time before Palestine was a state, when Jews were moving to the region in dribs and drabs, and then in progressively larger numbers. The British government, meanwhile, made early efforts at keeping the peace, but these proved fruitless.

This is a mosaic history, capturing the chaotic events on the ground through snippets of action. It covers violence at the Western Wall that started as a minor skirmish—a bleak precursor to the revolt to come. The 1936 conflict stemmed from questions of how to divide the land and how to deal with the influx of Jewish people—questions that remain relevant today. Kessler notes that, for the Arab residents, the problem was one of immigration and economics; for the Zionists, it was about finding a home. These two positions soon became irreconcilable issues, leading to sporadic violence and then to continual confrontation.

The book highlights the work of powerful British functionaries in handling early confrontations: they are memorialized for starting commissions to study the matter and to generate ideas, though many of their ideas weren't followed or were followed to ill effect. None solved the problem, making this account of the earliest days of the conflict all the more heartbreaking. And Kessler's text ends with yet another doomed effort, paving the way for further conflict in the region.

*Palestine 1936* is a timely history book that probes the beginning of the Palestine-Israel conflict to show how many of today's issues echo those of the past.

JEREMIAH ROOD (January / February 2023)

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