# Jerusalem Vegetable Market Massacre 1938: Irgun Bombs Arab Shoppers

**In mid-July 1938 the Zionist Irgun detonated a bomb in the middle of the Arab vegetable market in the Old City of Jerusalem, while the market was crowded with vendors and shoppers, killing 10 Palestinians and wounding 31.** [1] [2]

The massacre was part of a wave of bombings the Irgun carried out in the Arab markets of Haifa, Jerusalem and Jaffa in summer 1938, and it is one of the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people a decade before the Nakba. [1]

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## The vegetable market massacre at a glance

| Item | Details |
|---|---|
| Date | Mid-July 1938 (between 13 and 16 July depending on the source, most likely Friday 15 July) [1] [2] [3] |
| Place | The Arab vegetable market in the Old City of Jerusalem [2] |
| Perpetrator | The Zionist Irgun (Etzel) [1] [2] |

| Item | Details |
|---|---|
| Method | A bomb detonated in the middle of the crowded market [1] [2] |
| Killed | 10 Palestinians [1] [2] |
| Wounded | 31; another account gives 3 [2] [3] |
| Context | The Great Palestinian Revolt, and the Irgun's wave of bombings in Arab markets in summer 1938 [1] [4] |

## The Irgun and the bombing of markets

The Irgun (Etzel) was founded in 1931 as a split from the Haganah and regarded "political violence and terrorism" as legitimate tools for its aims. [1] In the 1930s it carried out more than 60 operations, mostly bombings and shootings in Haifa, Jerusalem, Jaffa and elsewhere, and repeatedly chose crowded Arab markets as targets because they guaranteed the largest number of civilian victims. [1]

Palestine was then in the midst of the Great Revolt (1936–1939) against the British Mandate and Zionist immigration, and the market bombs served as collective punishment of ordinary Palestinians.

## The massacre: July 1938

In late June 1938 the Irgun threw a bomb into a crowded Jerusalem market, killing an unknown number of Palestinians. [1] Weeks later, in mid-July, it detonated a bomb in the Arab vegetable market in the Old City, killing 10 Palestinians and wounding 31. [2] [1]

The WAFA list tells the same incident from another angle: on 15 July 1938, a Friday, an Irgun member threw a hand grenade in front of a Jerusalem mosque just as worshippers were leaving, killing 10 and wounding 3. [3] The matching date and toll suggest it was the same bomb, thrown into the crowd of worshippers spilling out into the market.

It was not the last bombing of the same market: on 27 February 1939 another 4

people were killed by a bomb in the Jerusalem vegetable market, in a series of attacks that killed 33 Palestinians in a single day. [1]

## A summer of bombs in Arab markets

The vegetable market massacre was not an isolated incident but part of an organised campaign in which the Irgun struck the markets of Palestine's major cities within a few weeks: [1]

| Date | City | Attack | Toll |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6 July 1938 | Haifa | Two bombs in the central Arab vegetable market | 18 to 21 Arabs killed, dozens wounded [1] [4] |
| Mid-July 1938 | Jerusalem | A bomb in the Arab vegetable market in the Old City | 10 killed, 31 wounded [1] [2] |
| 25 July 1938 | Haifa | A bomb in the Haifa market | 53 killed [1] |
| 26 August 1938 | Jaffa | A bomb in the Jaffa market | 24 killed [1] |

A telegram from the US Consul General in Jerusalem bears witness to the first Haifa bombing, reporting that "two powerful Jewish bombs" were thrown into the central Arab vegetable market, killing 21 Arabs. [4] These massacres are covered in detail in the Haifa massacres.

## The accounts and the dates

| Source | Date | Details |
|---|---|---|
| Arabi Post | 16 July 1938 | A bomb in a Jerusalem market, 10 killed [1] |
| Addustour list (via The Palestine Project) | 13 July 1938 | An explosion in the Arab vegetable market in the Old City, 10 killed and 31 wounded [2] |

| Source | Date | Details |
|---|---|---|
| WAFA (“Jerusalem mosque massacre”) | 15 July 1938 | A hand grenade in front of a mosque as worshippers left, 10 killed and 3 wounded [3] |
| WAFA, and Al-Rafidain Center citing it | 31 December 1937 | A bomb at the vegetable market near Nablus Gate, dozens killed [3] [5] |
| Addustour list (via The Palestine Project) | 1 October 1937 | A bomb in the vegetable market near Damascus (Nablus) Gate, dozens killed [2] |

This article adopts the July 1938 bombing because it is documented with a specific toll. The account placing the massacre in 1937 gives different dates in different lists, names no specific number of victims, and could not be documented in available sources. [3] [2]

This event should not be confused with the Bab al-Amud massacre of 29 December 1947, when a bomb thrown from a taxi at Damascus Gate killed 11 Arabs and wounded 32, [6] nor with the bombs thrown on 13 December 1947 into an Arab market near Damascus Gate. [6]

## Conclusion

The Irgun chose the vegetable market in Jerusalem’s Old City because it was packed with civilians. It killed 10 and wounded 31, then returned to the same market months later. These bombings marked the beginning of a Zionist pattern of targeting Palestinian civilian gatherings that reached its peak in the Nakba ten years later.

## Frequently asked questions about the Jerusalem vegetable market massacre

### When did the Jerusalem vegetable market massacre take

### place?

In mid-July 1938, most likely on Friday 15 July. Some lists place it in 1937 without documentation.

### Who carried out the vegetable market massacre?

It was carried out by the Zionist Irgun (Etzel).

### How many people were killed in the vegetable market massacre?

10 killed and 31 wounded.

### How is it related to the Jerusalem mosque massacre?

They are most likely the same event: the WAFA list records a bomb thrown in front of a Jerusalem mosque as worshippers left on 15 July 1938, with the same toll of 10 killed.

### Is it the same as the Bab al-Amud massacre?

No. The Bab al-Amud massacre took place on 29 December 1947, when a bomb was thrown from a taxi at Damascus Gate.

## Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.


1. Amani Mbarek, “Everything You Need to Know About the Armed Irgun Gangs and Their Operations Against Palestinians,” Arabi Post, 23 July 2024.
2. “Notorious Massacres of Palestinians between 1937 & 1948,” The Palestine Project, after Addustour (Jordan), 15 May 2013.
3. “Israeli Massacres,” Palestinian National Information Centre (WAFA).
4. Telegram from US Consul General in Jerusalem Wadsworth, document

930, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1938, Volume II.

5. Jasim al-Shammari, “Zionist Attacks in Palestine Before 1948 (1–2),” Al-Rafidain Center for Strategic Studies.
6. United Nations General Assembly, document A/9801, annex “Zionist/Israeli acts of terrorism 1939–1974,” 1974.