



March 2021

Dear Friend of Israel,

This is a wonderful time of year! **We have just celebrated Purim, that joyous holiday based on the miraculous outcome of the Book of Esther.** In normal years, we dress up in fantastic costumes, ranging from Biblical heroes to television superheroes, we prepare and give goodie packages to neighbors and friends, and we enjoy parties and large festive meals. And of course, we crowd into the synagogue to hear the Book of Esther read aloud for all to hear, and praise G-d for His goodness to us.

This year, **we heard the Book of Esther outside or in small gatherings in private homes, we had small meals with only immediate family and there were no parties.** It wasn't depressing but it was certainly different. And the big question that we have now is whether we will be able to have large family seders on Passover or if, once again, we will be limited to smaller gatherings.

One year ago, the COVID pandemic hit Israel and the huge burst in illness was directly related to the festivities surrounding Purim. No one realized at the time what this illness was all about and no one could imagine that one year later, we would still be struggling with the same issue.

But what is the essence of these two holidays, Purim and Passover, and what messages do they bring to us today? On Purim, we celebrate the salvation of our people from a cruel plot to destroy our entire nation, as we were exiled from our land and subject to the dictates of the Persians some 2,500 years ago. On Passover, we celebrate the salvation of our people as G-d delivered us from our first exile and brought us to the Land of Israel for the first time. Passover represents our beginning as a people with the expectation of freedom and our own land. Purim represents the perils of exile, a situation that would repeat itself many times over the past 2,000 years.

And yet **today, we are back in our own country, in the Land of Israel,** in many ways harking back to the wonder that would have greeted the Nation of Israel as they first entered the land under Joshua. But this time, we have come back after years of Purim-like experiences; we are wiser, perhaps even more cynical, ever more careful as to whom we can trust and what we can expect.

Whether we are facing the challenges from our enemies who continue to seek our destruction, or the challenges from a pandemic that continues to threaten our wellbeing, **we can be sure that our salvation will ultimately come from one source – the G-d of Israel, who watches over us and protects us.** We seek our friends and allies and you, our treasured friends, are precious to us, indeed. But, in the end it is only when our friends join with the G-d of Israel that true salvation is upon us.

Sincerely,

Sondra Oster Baras
Director, Israel Office

P.S. Thank you for being our friend and for listening carefully to G-d's messages during this difficult time. Anything you can give to help protect the people of Henanit is greatly appreciated. You can read about this special community in the enclosed Heartland Highlight. Please join me in praying for their continued safety and protection.