

From At-Risk Youth to Children of Promise

A bar and bat mitzvah is one of the most significant lifecycle events in the life of a Jewish person, and certainly the most significant for teens and young adults. What happens when teens who come from troubled homes, whose parents cannot care for them properly, and who are considered “at-risk,” reach this milestone in a year of war and trauma? How can the scars and trauma of war be erased so that this special time in their lives will only be remembered as one of joy?

In May, Israel suffered a war/conflict/battle with Palestinian Arab terror groups in Gaza. For two weeks, Israel was bombarded when over 4,300 rockets were fired by the terrorists at Israeli communities. Millions of Israelis of all backgrounds lived with fear of rockets being launched at them at any minute. For two weeks, many didn't leave their homes to stay near their bomb shelters. Children didn't go to school. In addition to the death and injury to many people, and damage to property, many more suffered trauma that still remains.

Overlaying that with a population of at-risk Israeli youth coming of age at a time that's meant to be celebratory, yet now finding even their safe space is not safe, trauma and anxiety breed. With the support of numerous Christians from all over the world, the Genesis 123 Foundation's Israel emergency relief fund stepped in to help take care of the most vulnerable impacted the most and still suffering because of the war. While the rockets stopped, the trauma remains.

The Genesis 123 Foundation stepped up to sponsor the bar/bat mitzvah celebration for a special group of children, thanks to the generosity of all those who donated. Genesis 123 was privileged to become the largest sponsor of the bar/bat mitzvah celebration, joining many others who donated cash,

time, gifts, dress clothes and more to make this celebration something joyous that the children will remember for the rest of their lives.

Boys received new clothes including white shirts that they wore with the creases still visible. Girls were able to pick from among dozens of dresses donated so they looked and felt special and had a pretty dress to take home. Professional hair stylists and makeup artists made the girls look and feel extra special, donating their time and lots of tender, loving care.

At the party, the children were radiant. Their parents and siblings joined for the celebration. Even though the immediate trauma of the war passed, now, thanks to so many who donated generously, the milestone year of becoming a bar or bat mitzvah will not be overshadowed by a war that prevented their celebration. Despite the war, they will always be able to look back on this year as one of joy.

Maybe we cannot change their circumstances, or prevent other wars, but we can change things in the lives of those who need the most help, so they will no longer be looked at as youth at risk but children of promise.

We pray that there will be no more war and trauma in these children's lives and that this milestone will be the beginning of a new chapter in their future as young adults, stable parents and responsible citizens.

Listen to this episode of *Inspiration From Zion with Jonathan Feldstein* on Charisma Podcast Network. {eo}

Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He is president of the Genesis 123 Foundation which builds bridges between Jews and Christians and writes regularly for a

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