**A Prayer for Yerushalayim**

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| Return to your city Yerushalayim with mercy.  And dwell in her as You promised.  And rebuild her quickly in our days, an eternal building.  And quickly establish David's throne within her.  Blessed are You, Adonai, who rebuilds Jerusalem. | וְלִירוּשָׁלַיִם עִירְךָ בְּרַחֲמִים תָּשׁוּב.  וְתִשְׁכּן בְּתוכָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ.  וּבְנֵה אותָהּ בְּקָרוב בְּיָמֵינוּ בִּנְיַן עולָם.  וְכִסֵּא דָוִד מְהֵרָה לְתוכָהּ תָּכִין.  בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', בּונֵה יְרוּשָׁלָיִם: |

This prayer and the next are connected to the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and the restoration of the kingship of David. Both of these are connected in Judaism to a belief in what could be called "the end of times" or "the coming of the Messiah." Many religions, especially Judaism and Christianity, believe that the world in which we live is an imperfect world, one which we hope could be made perfect in some mythological "end of days" when God or a messiah, or somehow, the world will be redeemed and the problems of the world will be solved. The symbol of such "redemption" is the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the idealized perfect city, and the restoration of perfect justice, symbolized by the kingship of David.

* Do you think it is important for people to believe in an "end of days"?
* Even if this is a hard belief for you personally to accept, could you imagine why it might help people? What type of people might it especially help?
* Are there other beliefs that you might not rationally accept, but that you could hope for anyway?
* When else in the Jewish calendar or prayers do we hope for "redemption" (גאולה) or for a return to Jerusalem?
* Is there a modern version of this belief, for instance the belief that in the future there will be no more war, or technology will solve our problems? Do you believe that this will happen? Why do you think so many people, even those who are not particularly religious, hold out hope that the world will "be redeemed?"

**Has Jerusalem Really been Rebuilt**

This prayer seems to be a bit strange—after all, Jerusalem has largely been rebuilt. In 1948 during the Independence War, Israel took over the western half of Jerusalem. And in 1967, during the Six Day War, Israel conquered the remaining half of Jerusalem, including the Old City, the Western Wall and many other sites of historical significance. Since then Jerusalem has been vastly rebuilt, with a modern university, hospitals, numerous government buildings, museums, synagogues, schools and many tourist sites. Today there is even a rail line to take one quickly from one end of the city to the other. How then can we still say this prayer, hoping for Jerusalem to be rebuilt?

With this question in mind read the following aggadah (legend):

**Tanhuma Noah 17**

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said: Jerusalem will not be rebuilt until all the exiles have been gathered. If someone says to you: All the exiles have been gathered, but Jerusalem is still not rebuilt , do not believe him, for the Bible says, "Adonai will rebuild Jerusalem" and then (immediately after) it says, "He will gather together the dispersed."

According to this source, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the gathering of all exiled Jews are inseparable. That is to say—the two will happen at the same time and one cannot happen without the other.

* According to this source what does it mean for Jerusalem to be rebuilt?
* Why must all of the exiles be gathered for Jerusalem to be considered rebuilt?
* What might Jerusalem represent?

**The Belief in the Messiah in Judaism**

There are many contradictory beliefs in Judaism concerning the hope for a messiah, a person to come and redeem the world from its troubles. Think about the following two sources and then compare them:

**1) Avot de-Rabbi Natan 31**

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai used to say: If you have a sapling in your hand and are told, "Look, the Messiah is here," you should first plant the sapling and then go out to welcome the Messiah.

* Why does Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai tell the person to first plant a tree?
* What is his attitude towards the "coming of the Messiah"?
* What do you think is the attitude of the person he is talking to?

**2) Bavli Ketubot 111b**

Our rabbis taught: The verse, "A handful of wheat in the Land will reach up to the top of the mountains" means that a stalk of wheat will rise as high as a palm tree, reaching up to the tops of the mountains. But you may say, "Then it will be difficult to harvest it." Therefore the Bible says, "Its fruit shall rustle like the Lebanon." Out of His treasury the Holy One will bring a wind, which will blow upon the wheat and cause its fine flour to drop. Then a man will go out into the field and bring in a mere handful of the flour, out of which there will be enough for his own and his household's maintenance.

* What is the person who reads this legend hoping for? What do you think his life is like?
* How will reading this aggadah affect his life?
* Do you wish for things like this to happen in your life?
* How does this story/passage differ from the previous one? Do they disagree?
* If we combine the message from these stories what might we think about "the coming of the messiah?"