

# This Week in Jewish History

Highlights from "The Israel Bible"

**On the 5th of Marcheshvan 1920,** Hebrew became one of the official languages of the courts in Israel under the British Mandate.

The modern revival of Hebrew as a spoken language was nothing short of a miracle, and marked the beginning of the fulfillment of the following verse:

**For then I will make the peoples pure of speech, So that they all invoke Hashem by name And serve Him with one accord.** (Tzefanya 3:9)

The prophet describes how in the future, all the nations of the world will have 'pure speech,' *safa b'rura*. Ibn Ezra, among other commentators, maintains that the pure speech that Tzefanya promises is the language of Hebrew, and that in future times the whole world will begin to learn Hebrew, the language of Creation. Biblical Hebrew, referred to here as 'pure speech,' is also known as *Lashon HaKodesh*, 'the holy language'. The Maharal (D'varim 1:23) writes that each language reflects the essence of the nation that speaks it. Since the Jewish people are a holy people, they speak the holy language, and since it is holy and pure, it contains no vulgar or shameful words. The Ramban (Sh'mot 30:13) adds that what makes this language holy is that "it is the language with which God speaks with His prophets and His nation." With the revival of the Hebrew language, Jews again began conversing in the holy language. In our generation, the prophecy described in this verse has come to prominent fruition, as millions

of people all over the world, both Jews and gentiles, are learning Hebrew in order to speak *Lashon HaKodesh*.

**On the 6th of Marcheshvan in 1948,** the first census was taken in the State of Israel. At the time, the Jewish population numbered 712,000, while today there are more than 6.5 million Jews in the Holy Land. Counting the Jewish people was the foremost commandment given by Hashem to Moshe and Aharon in preparation for travel from the desert to the Land of Israel, as we find in the following verse:

**Take a census of the whole Israelite community by the clans of its ancestral houses, listing the names, every male, head by head.** (Bamidbar 1:2)

This is one of several censuses described in the Bible, and the first of two in Sefer Bamidbar. In fact, the English name of the book, Numbers, derives from these two countings. Since the Israelites were heading toward the Promised Land to conquer and settle it, the census serves to inform the leadership of how many soldiers they have available for their army and among how many people the land would then need to be divided. Rashi, however, gives another reason for the count. He explains that Hashem counts His people repeatedly, simply because they are precious to Him. Just as someone with a valuable collection will count its contents over and over, so too Hashem frequently counts His people, to teach us that every individual is precious to Him. Similarly, we count every Jew living in Israel today since each one is significant and makes an impact on the State.