Yadayim, Chapter Four, Mishnah Five

Introduction

Today's mishnah returns to the subject of scrolls defiling the hands.

Mishnah Five

The Aramaic sections in Ezra and Daniel defile the hands.

If an Aramaic section was written in Hebrew, or a Hebrew section was written in Aramaic, or [Hebrew which was written with] Hebrew script, it does not defile the hands.

It never defiles the hands until it is written in the Assyrian script, on parchment, and in ink.

Explanation

Section one: There are some portions of the book of Ezra and the book of Daniel that are in Aramaic, not Hebrew. These sections defile the hands just as do other portions of the Bible. The fact that they are in Aramaic does not make them less holy.

Section two: This section seems to teach that Aramaic and Hebrew are not inherently holy languages such that they should defile the hands. If a portion of the Bible that is in Hebrew was translated into Aramaic (targum) it doesn't defile the hands. Neither do Hebrew translations of the Aramaic parts of the Bible.

The Hebrew script we use is called Assyrian script. The older script is called by scholars "Phoenician script" and is called by the rabbis "Hebrew script." According to the Talmud, Ezra switched the script from the ancient Hebrew to the Assyrian. If a scroll of the Tanakh was written in this ancient script, it does not defile the hands.

Section three: Only Tanakh scrolls written with the proper script, Assyrian, on parchment (made from the hides of an animal) and with ink are valid as ritual objects. Therefore, only these scrolls defile the hands.