

The Good Word

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THE BIBLICAL BOOK OF TOBIT, PART II: HISTORY

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HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF THE BOOK OF TOBIT:

The *Book of Tobit* is set in the seventh and eighth centuries before Christ in the ancient Kingdoms of Assyria and Media. The authors, Tobit and his son Tobiah, mention several known cities and multiple known events in the history of Israel and the Neo-Assyrian Empire which help establish their time and place in history. However, Protestants and academics do not consider the *Book of Tobit* to be scripture nor even inspired fiction due, in part, to alleged historical and geographical errors. For example:

“The story places Tobit in the days of the Assyrian captivity and thus in the 8th cent. B.C. There are, however, a number of difficulties involved in the historical and geographical details of the book. Thus Tobit says that when he was ‘still a young man’ the tribe of Naphtali deserted Jerusalem (1:4). This rebellion, however, seems to have occurred about 931 BC. Following the death of Solomon (cf. *1 Kings 12:16-19*), long before the time of Tobit. A more significant problem lies in the statement that it was in the days of Shalmaneser (in *Tobit* he is designated by the Gr. equivalent *Enemessar*) that Naphtali was taken into captivity (1:2). In reality, it was not Shalmaneser V who did this, but rather his predecessor Tiglath-Pileser III, in about 734 BC (cf. *2 Kings 15:29*). Sennacherib is said to have been the son of Shalmaneser and to have reigned in his place after his death (*Tobit* 1:15). Sennacherib, however, was really the son of Sargon II, a monarch who, although he reigned for some fifteen years, is not mentioned at all in *Tobit*. The reference at the end of the book to the destruction of Nineveh by Nebuchadnezzar and Ahasuerus (14:15) is erroneous, since Nineveh actually fell to Nabopolassar and the Median king Cyaxares (612 b.c.).”¹

Consequently, it is important for us Orthodox to understand these issues and to vigorously defend *Tobit*, knowing that the book is canonical Scripture for us Orthodox even though it is not used in our liturgical services.

The pertinent verses which help us to place Tobit in time are found primarily at the beginning and very end

of the book. Geographically pertinent verses are more widely scattered. In this article we will look carefully at the historical setting of *Tobit* using the earlier G^{II} text as the starting point, noting any significant historical or geographic differences in the later G^I text, Old Latin VL versions, or Hebrew/Aramaic texts from Qumran.**

Tobit 1:1 (G^{II} FM) This is the book of the story of **Tobit**, son of Tobiel, son of Hananiel, son of Aduel, son of Gabael, son of Raphael son of Raguel, of the descendants of Asiel, of the **tribe of Naphtali**, 2. **who in the days of [Enemessar], king of the Assyrians, was taken captive from Thisbe, which is south of Kedesh Naphtali in Upper Galilee, above Hazor toward the west, north of Peor.**

Here we have our first clues to Tobit’s time in history and place of birth. Tobit is a descendant of Naphtali, one of the sons of Jacob (Israel) through Bilhah, the maidservant of Rachael (*Genesis 30:7-8*). The tribe of Naphtali was allocated an inheritance in the land of Israel to the north and the west of the sea of Galilee in the time of Joshua (*Joshua 19:32-9*). Kedesh Naphtali, a well known city in Upper Galilee, was appointed to be a city of refuge by the Israelites (*Joshua 20:7*). Hazor was a Canaanite city conquered by Joshua and was eventually consigned to desolation forever by the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah (*Jeremiah 49:33*). Peor is mentioned in *Numbers 23:28* as having a high place where Balaam the prophet offered seven bullocks and rams to the LORD and blessed Israel when Balak the King of Moab wanted him to curse Israel. *Thisbe*, a city not known outside of *Tobit*, is nestled in the midst of these 3 towns, in the very heart of Naphtali’s allotted portion of the Holy Land.

We also note that Tobit was taken captive from *Thisbe* by King Enemessar of Assyria. The name “*Enemessar(os)*” (Greek: *Ενεμεσσάρως*) is found only in chapter 1 of the *Book of Tobit* (verses 2, 13, 15, and 16) of the Greek major (G^{II}) and minor (G^I) recensions. The name “*Salmaneser*” is found only in the Old Latin and the *Vulgate* versions.² Unfortunately, the extant Qumran Aramaic and Hebrew fragments of *Tobit* from Cave 4 do not contain these verses. This name, *Enemessar*, is not found anywhere else in Scripture nor in is it found in any ancient or modern historical records. So who is this *Enemessar(os)*?

1. *Encyclopedia of the Bible*, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Book-Tobit>.

2. Masoretic text 4 Kings 17:3, 18:9: reads Shalmaneser = שַׁלְמַנְאֶסֶר

**G^I = Greek minor recension, G^{II} = Greek major recension, FM = recension by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, VL = Old Latin *Vetus Latina* recension.

Obviously, the translators/redactors of the Old Latin versions and the Vulgate thought it referred to the Assyrian king whom we now call Shalmaneser V [Hebrew: שַׁלְמַנְשַׁרְשַׁר; Greek: Σαλ(α)μανασ(σ)άρ; Latin *Salmanassar*] who reigned from 727-722 BC). So they replaced *Enemessar* with *Salmanassar*. Indeed, having *Salmanassar* found in the *Vulgate* was one of the reasons that provoked Martin Luther and the Protestants to question the inerrancy of *Tobit* and its place in the canon of Scripture. Some modern scholars believe this name refers to Sargon II (722-705 BC) [Hebrew: שַׂרְגֹן; Greek: Ἀρνῶ] and still others to Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) [Hebrew: תִּגְלַתְפִּלְסַר; Greek: Θαλαθφελλασάρ]. So which is it? The current online Roman Catholic Encyclopedia believes the name *Enemessaros* to be Sargon II³ based on a phonetic-linguistic argument. However, I personally have a difficult time following and believing their unreferenced argument.

Of the three kings Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser V, and Sargon II, there is only one that both the Bible and the historical records of Assyria affirm as having conquered and deported the inhabitants of Naphtali. That king is Tiglath-Pileser III.

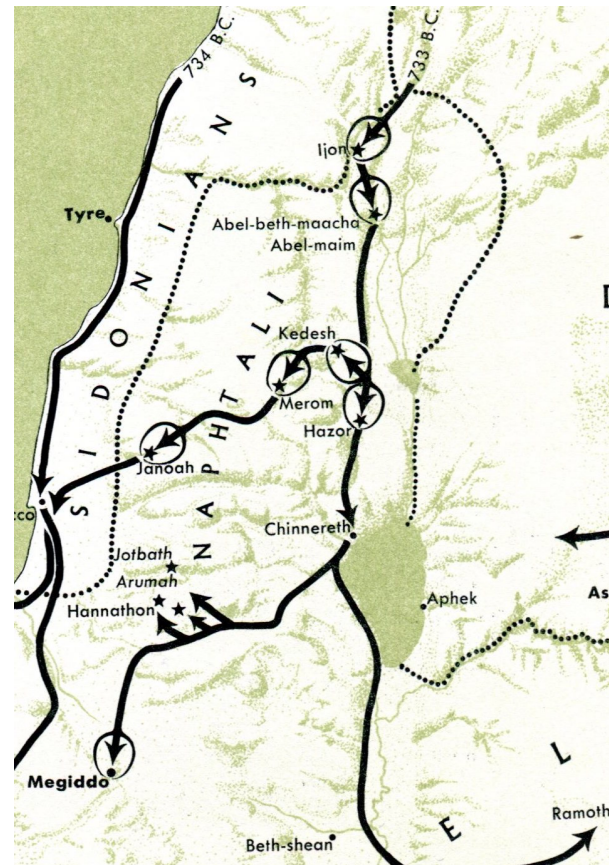
CAMPAIGN OF TIGLATH-PILESER III AGAINST NAPHTHALI IN 732 BC IN THE BIBLICAL AND ASSYRIAN RECORDS

Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) was among the most powerful kings of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. His name, Tiglath Pileser III, is the Hebrew version of the Akkadian *Tukulti-Apil-Esara* which he chose to link himself directly to the great Assyrian kings of the past. He was of royal blood but not in the direct line of accession to the throne. Rather he seized the throne through a palace coup. Under his reign, the Empire expanded and populations were forcibly relocated throughout the empire to maximize the efficiency of the communities, to encourage assimilation, and to discourage revolt. He was a very adept administrator and is regarded as one of the greatest military leaders in history. Once any of the conquered peoples assured their loyalty to him, they were allowed to retain some autonomy and live their lives as they chose.⁴

4 Kingdoms 15:29 KJV *In the days of Pekah king of Israel came **Tiglathpileser** king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abelbethmaachah, and Janoah, and **Kedesh**, and **Hazor**, and Gilead, and **Galilee**, all the land of **Naphtali**, and carried them captive to Assyria.*

From the verses above and the map below one can readily appreciate that the campaign of Tiglath-Pileser III and deportation of the survivors in *4 Kingdoms*

corresponds very closely with that of *Enemessar* in *Tobit 1:2*. Moreover, both of these correspond well with the Assyrian historical records of Tiglath-Pileser III preserved in writing and reliefs from Nimrud which depict scenes from his campaign. This is not the case for Shalmaneser V, nor for Sargon II.



MAP: CONQUEST OF NAPHTHALI BY TIGLATH-PILESER 732 BC⁵ [Tobit's home town of Thisbe would be just east of Merom.]

“The Assyrian point of view has been preserved in three annals (Ann 18, 23, 24), three summary inscriptions (Summ. 4, 9, 13), in Eponym Canon C^b, and several letters (ND 2064, 2417, 2430, 2686, 2715, 2716, 2766, 2767).

“In this phase of the campaigns Tiglath-Pileser III moved through Israel from Galilee as far as Ashkelon. ... Tiglath-Pileser III captured Galilee (Ann. 18:1'-7'; 24:1'-11'; *4 Kingdoms 15:29*), then moved southwest and captured Gezer. ... The population of Galilee was deported and much booty was taken off to Assyria (Summ. 13:17'-8'; *4 Kingdoms 15:29*). ... The campaign in Israel described in the Bible took place in 732 BC: the Assyrian army came from the Valley of Lebanon, conquering the outlying fortresses of Israel in the northern Jordan Valley and then split up into several columns to spread out over the various regions of the Holy Land. The Galilee, Jezreel, Sharon, and Gilead were all conquered.”⁶

5. Yohanan Aharoni, Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Campaign of Tiglath-Pileser III*, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., New York, NY, 1977, Map.147, p 94.

6. Peter Dubovsky, *Tiglath-Pileser III's Campaigns in 734-732 B.C.*, *Biblica*, Vol. 87, No. 2, 2006, p. 153-170.

One of Tiglath-Pileser's inscriptions preserves the numbers of inhabitants taken from several cities in the Upper and Lower Galilee. Merom, a city in Naphtali, is common to his annals, to *Tobit 1:2*, and to *4 Kingdoms 15:29* [Note: some table entries are not legible in the original inscription and are signified with a "?"]:

Name of City	Number of Captives
?	625
Hannathon	-?-
Kanah	650
(Jo)tbath	-?-
Yiron	650
Arumah	-?-
Merom	-?-

Following his defeat, Pekah (the King of Israel and son of Remaliah) was killed. Hoshea, the son of Elah, was subsequently placed on the throne of Israel by Tiglath-Pileser III. His remnant kingdom was spared by paying heavy tribute to Assyria (*4 Kingdoms 17:3*).

So, based on his conquest of Naphtali and the deporting of her citizens to Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser III is certainly the best candidate to be King Enemessar of Assyria. What about Shalmanasser and Sargon II?

CAMPAIGN OF SHALMANASSER V AND SARGON II AGAINST SAMARIA IN 724-722 BC IN THE BIBLICAL AND ASSYRIAN RECORDS

A few years later, because of Egyptian prodding, King Hoshea of Samaria and his remnant of Israel, rebelled against their Assyrian rule. In response King Shalmaneser V attacked Samaria in 724 BC. Although King Hoshea surrendered, the battle continued for 3 years with Sargon II assuming command in 722 BC (after the "sudden demise" of Shalmaneser V). Sargon II recorded the following in his Great Khorsabad Inscription:

"At the beginning of my kingship, in the first year of my reign [722 BC], Samaria I besieged, and I took. I carried off 27,290 of the people dwelling within it. I collected 50 chariots in their midst, and I allowed the rest to keep their possessions. I appointed my satrap over them; the tribute [due to] the former king I laid upon them."⁷

Sargon II, who reigned from 722-705 BC, became one of the most important kings of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. He was the son of Tiglath-Pileser III and possibly the younger brother of Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC). He is thought to have usurped his brother's rule in a coup, assumed the throne, and took the title of Sargon, meaning "true king", to legitimize his reign. Assyria achieved its greatest political and military stature under him.

Sargon is known in Scripture from only one Bible

7. Max Kellner, *The Fall of the Kingdom of Israel, The Biblical World*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Jan., 1905), *The Great Khorsabad Inscription*, line 24, p. 18, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3141292>

verse, *Isaiah 20:1*, *In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, when Sargon [𐏊𐏁𐏃𐏂 'Apvā], the king of Assyria sent him, and fought against Ashdod, and took it. He is also known from inscriptions and court documents.*

The Old Testament Book of 4 Kingdoms confirms the Assyrian campaign against Samaria but fails to mention Sargon II by name:



4 Kingdoms 17:1 In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years [730-721 BC]. 2 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him. 3 Against him came up **Shalmaneser** king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents. 4 And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison. 5 **Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria [724 BC], and besieged it three years. 6 In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria [Sargon II] took Samaria [721 BC], and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes** [the latter are east of Nineveh - see map above].


4 Kingdoms 18:9 And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that **Shalmaneser** king of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it. 10 And at the end of three years **they** [the Assyrians] took it: even in the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel [721 BC], Samaria was taken. 11 And the king of Assyria [Sargon II] did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in **Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.**

But, just as in the Scriptures above, in Sargon's own records there is no mention of the reconquest of Naphtali nor of deportation of its people to Nineveh. Rather, Samaritan captives were deported to Media as well as Halah and Habor by the River Gozan [in south central Turkey some 200 miles to the west of Nineveh].

"Later on, in 721 [BC], 715 [BC], etc., [Sargon wrote that he] 'brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Avva, and from Namath and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel.'"⁸

In so doing, Sargon was following standard Assyrian political and military procedures initiated by his

8. *Ibid.*, *The Cylinder Inscription*, lines 17-20, p. 14.



predecessors as far back as King Adad-Nirari I (1307-1275 BC). But he replaced only deported Samaritans with non-Israelites from Assyrian lands.

Thus, from the Biblical record and Sargon II's Assyrian records, it would appear that neither Shalmaneser's nor Sargon's conquests of Samaria are compatible with a reconquest of Naphtali and the deportation of her people into Assyria, nor of Tobit from Thisbe to Nineveh. So, thus far, Tiglath-Pileser III remains the most viable candidate to be associated with this enigmatic name of *Enemessaros* (Ενεμεσσάρως) found in the G^I and G^{II} manuscripts of the Greek *Septuagint* Book of Tobit.

TOBIT'S AGE AND THE BREAKING AWAY OF NAPHTALI FROM THE HOUSE OF DAVID

Tobit 1:3 (G^{II} FM) I, Tobit, walked the paths of fidelity and righteousness all the days of my life. I gave many alms to my relatives and those of my nation who went with me in captivity to Nineveh in the land of the Assyrians. 4. While I was still young in my own land of Israel, the entire tribe of my ancestor Naphtali broke away from the house of David, my ancestor, and from Jerusalem, the city of all the tribes of Israel, where they might all offer sacrifice.

In 922 BC, because King Solomon had led Israel astray to worship Astoreth the god of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcam the god of the Ammonites, Jeroboam (an Israelite from the tribe of Ephraim and son of one of Solomon's servants), was chosen and made king of the northern 10 tribes of Israel in accordance with the word of the Lord given through the prophet Ahijah:

3 Kingdoms 11:26 And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up his hand against the king. 27 And this was the cause that he lifted up his hand against the king: Solomon built Millo, and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father. 28 And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph. 29 And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field: 30 And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces: 31 And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: 32 (But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:) 33 Because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father. 34 Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him

prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes: 35 But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes. 36 And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light always before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there. 37 And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. 38 And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee.

If we assume that Tiglath-Pileser III is Enemessar, and that he deported the people of Naphtali after their conquest in 732 BC, and that Tobit was still young in 922 BC when the 10 northern tribes broke away from Judah and formed a new kingdom under Jeroboam, then Tobit would be over 200 years old by the time of the deportation of the people of Thisbe in Naphtali by Tiglath-Pileser. That is another objection to the inerrancy and canonicity of *Tobit* by the heterodox and academic critics. When all the various versions of *Tobit* are compared, we do see a few variant readings:

Greek Long Recension (G^{II}): 1:4 While I was still young in my own land of Israel, the entire tribe of my ancestor Naphtali broke away from the house of David, my ancestor, and from Jerusalem.

Greek Short Recension (G^I): While I was younger ... *Vetus Latina (VL):* While I was younger than all others in the tribe of Naphtali ... Jerome's *Vulgate (Vg)* adds: but he did nothing childish in (his) deed(s)

The Aramaic and Hebrew fragments from Qumran unfortunately do not contain these verses.

But none of these versions help us resolve this striking age claim in *Tobit*. Moreover, if we look at *Tobit 14:1*, we note that Tobit died at the age of 112 years old -- far shorter than the 200 years necessary to witness the schism of Israel from Judah in 922 BC. Consequently, this is a significant internal discrepancy -- as the text is parsed in our English translations!

However, when we look at the *codicies A, B, and N (S Sinaiticus)* [see photo on the next page], we will note that they are uncial codicies, i.e., texts written in capital letters, i.e., with no spaces between the words and with no punctuation. As a result the reader has to know or choose where each phrase and sentence begins and ends to properly parse each sentence.

Consequently, if we partition the phrases differently, i.e., instead of the following:

1:3b *G^{II} FM* I gave many alms to my relatives and those of my nation who went with me in captivity to Nineveh in the

land of the Assyrians. 4 **While I was still young in my own land of Israel**, the entire tribe of my ancestor Naphtali broke away from the house of David, my ancestor, and from Jerusalem ... ,



CODEX SINAITICUS, TOBIT 1:1-7, BRITISH LIBRARY⁹
[The book title “*τωβειθ*” can be seen above the left column]

we can parse them differently and arrive the following:

1:3b *G^m* I gave many alms to my relatives and those of my nation **who went with me in captivity to Nineveh in the land of the Assyrians while I was still young**. 4 In my own land of Israel, the entire tribe of my ancestor Naphtali broke away¹⁰ from the house of David, my ancestor, and from Jerusalem, the city of all the tribes of Israel, where they might all offer sacrifices.

⁹ *Tobit* in the codex Sinaiticus is found starting in the 3rd column at <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/manuscript.aspx?book=10#>.

¹⁰ “broke away” = ἀπέστισον *G^m* text, 1st aor act ind 3rd per pl; ἀπέστυ *G^t* text, 2nd aor act ind 3rd per sg. Both indicate completed action in the past suggesting this could have happened much earlier.

I can think of no better way than this to explain this apparent chronological disparity for the age of Tobit. This re-parsing fits the context well. If Tobit was *still young* at the time of the deportation of Naphtali under Tiglath-Pileser, how old was he at that time? It would be hard to speculate from this verse alone since *young* and *younger* are both relative terms. However, there are other important clues in *Tobit*:

Tobit 14:1 G^m So ended Tobit’s works of thanksgiving. He died in peace at the age of one-hundred and twelve and was buried with honor in Nineveh. 2 He was sixty-two-years old when he was blinded, and after he regained his sight he lived in prosperity, giving alms, and never ceasing to praise (fear) God and acknowledge God’s majesty.

Tobit 2:10 G^m ... For four years I remained incapable of seeing. F

From these *G^m* verses we can calculate that Tobit lived 46 years after he became blind [62+ (4+42)=112].

The *G^t* states that he became blind at age 58, regained his sight after 8 years but fails to mention at what age he died.

The *VL* reads I could not use my eyes for four years, and that Tobit died at “annorum centum duodecim,” i.e, 112 years. However, it differs in his age when he was blinded and how long he lived after he regained his sight: “But he was 58 years old when he was blinded; and he lived for 54 years after he recovered light.” But here the math doesn’t add up: [(58+4+54) = 116]. An alternative Old Latin text, the *MS-R*, yields 106 years.

The *Vg* states that he was 56 when he became blind, was blind for 4 years, and lived another 42 years [56+4+42 = 102].


The *Aramaic 4Q196 18:13-14* reads “[and he was] fifty-eig[ht] years [old, when]/ [the sight of] his [e]yes.”

The *Hebrew 4Q200 7 ii5-6* reads “[and h]e was fifty]-eight years old / [when ...] his [s]ight, [and] afterwards [he lived fifty-] fo[ur years].

In my opinion, the best reading here would appear to be that Tobit was 58 years old (*VL*, *G^t*, Qumran Aramaic and Hebrew fragments) when he was blinded and afterwards he lived 54 years (*G^m*, *VL*, and *Hebrew 4Q200 7 ii5-6*) which must include the 4 years he was blind to have internal agreement with Tobit’s life span of 112 years.

Using Tobit’s age of 58 years when he became blind, we would be able to calculate the year of his birth and his age at the deportation from Naphtali were we able to determine in what year he became blind. Let’s review his life to ascertain when he became blind:

Tobit 1:16 (*G^m* text, *4QpapTob^a ar fragment*), In the days of Enemesar [Sargon II], I gave alms to my relatives, to those of my people. 17. I shared my food with the hungry and



my clothing with the naked; and if I saw the dead body of anyone of my nation tossed beyond *the wall of Nineveh*, I would bury it. 18. I Also buried anyone whom Sennacherib had put to death after he came back in flight from Judea in the days when the King of Heaven passed judgment on him for all his blasphemies [701 BC]. In his anger he slew many of the Israelites, but I would steal their bodies and bury them; when Sennacherib looked for them, he did not find them.

19. But *one of the Ninevites* went and informed the king about me, that I was burying them; so I hid myself. When I learned that the king knew about me and I was being sought for execution, I became afraid and ran away. 20. All my property was confiscated, and nothing was left to me that did not become part of royal holdings, except Hannah, my wife and Tobiah, my son.

21. **Forty days did not pass before two of his sons killed Sennacherib [681 BC], and they fled to the mountains of Ararat, His son Esarhaddon [681-669 BC] came to reign** after him, and he appointed Ahikar¹¹, the son of my brother 'Anael, over all the credit accounts of his kingdom, he had control of all the treasury accounts (of the king).

22. Then Ahikar interceded on my behalf, and I came back to Nineveh. For Ahikar had been the chief cup-bearer, keeper of the signet ring(s), comptroller, and treasury accountant under Sennacherib, the king of Assyria. Now Esarhaddon put him in charge as second to himself. Ahikar was my nephew and one of my kindred (and of my family.)

Tobit 2:1 Under King Esarhaddon [681-669 BC] (when I returned to my house, Hannah, my wife, and Tobiah, my son, were restored to me. On our festival of Pentecost, which is the sacred *Feast of Weeks*, a fine dinner was prepared for me, and I reclined to eat.

2. When they set the table before me, (I saw that) the cooked foods offered on it were many. So I said to Tobiah, my son, "Go, my boy, and get any poor person you find of our kinsfolk among the captives of Nineveh who is duly mindful of God; (my son, do) and get him; (let him be brought in that) he may eat together with me. Look, I shall wait, my boy, until you come back."

3. Tobiah went out to look for some poor person of our kindred, but he came back and said "Father!" I replied, "Yes, my child?" He spoke up, "Look father, one of our nation has been murdered and cast into the market place; he was strangled there moments ago."

4. I took him away from the square and put him in one of the outhouses until the sun would set and I might bury him.

5. Then I returned, I bathed and ate my food in sorrow. 6. I recalled the saying of the prophet Amos, how he spoke out against Bethel and said, "Your feasts shall be turned into

mourning, and all your paths into lamentation," 7. and I wept. When the sun had set, I went and dug a grave and buried him.

8. My neighbors mocked me, saying, "Is he still unafraid? He has already been hunted down to be put to death for this very deed! He once ran away, but now he is burying the dead again!"

9. **That same night I bathed and went into my courtyard. I lay down to sleep beside the courtyard wall, leaving my face uncovered because of the heat. 10. I did not know that sparrows were on the wall above me. Their droppings settled, still warm, into my eyes and produced white films.** I went to the doctors to be healed, but the more they applied their ointments, **the more my eyes grew dim because of the white films until I became completely blind. For four years [Gⁿ, VL, 4QpapTob^a ar] I remained incapable of seeing** [from age 58 to 62]. All my relatives grieved over me, and Ahikar cared for me for two years before he went to *Elymais*.

After Sennacherib was murdered and his son Esarhaddon ascended the throne in 681 BC, it would appear that Sennacherib's harsh policies against the Jews were reversed by King Esarhaddon, and new personnel for the new king's administration would have been sought out. That would make the year 681 BC the earliest year that Tobit could have returned to his house and to his wife and son Hannah and Tobiah -- the same year he later became blind. If he was 58 at the time he became blind, that means that the earliest year he could have been born in was 739 BC. Were this the case, Tobit would have been deported by Tiglath-Pileser in 732 BC at the age of 7 which is quite consistent with the re-parsed verses in *Tobit 1:3b-4a: I gave many alms to my relatives and those of my nation who went with me in captivity to Nineveh in the land of the Assyrians (4) while I was still young.* "7" is young!

Tiglath-Pileser ruled only another five years after the deportation of all of Naphtali, including Tobit, to Assyria (to the city of Nineveh). Subsequent to deportation Tobit married, had a son, and acquired a very responsible position in the service of the king, that of a purchasing agent. Most likely, this all occurred during the reign of Sargon II (722 BC-705 BC). Tobit would have been 17-34 years old during Sargon's reign -- old enough to marry and have a son, and would have had sufficient time to acquire and gain the king's recognition of his administrative and business talents:

Tobit 1:9 9 When I reached manhood, I married a woman from our ancestral kindred and had by her a son whom I named Tobiah. 10 After deportation to the Assyrians, when I was taken captive and came to Nineveh, everyone of my relatives and my people there used to eat the food of the Gentiles, 11 but I kept myself from eating such food. 12. Because I was duly mindful of my God, 13 the most High granted me favor and good standing before Enemessar [Sargon II?], and I used to buy for him all that he needed. 14 I used to go to Media and would buy for him until he died. I

11. Ahikar/Ahikar is mentioned in *Tobit 1, 2, 11, and 14*. He is mentioned in a cuneiform tablet from ancient Uruk: "[In the time of] King Esarhaddon, Aba-enlil-dari {whom} the Arameans call Ahuqar, was *ummanu* court scholar]. The well known and popular book of *Ahikar*, 7-8th century BC, was probably composed in Aramaic and used a few Akkadian words and Assyrian loan words common to the Imperial Aramaic language used in the Neo-Assyrian Empire. With the assimilation of the Naphtalites into the Assyrian Empire and the loss of their Biblical knowledge over the 200 years since being deported, it is not improbable that Tobit could have truly been the uncle of an assimilated or an intermarried Naphtalite Ahikar -- a point highly contested by critics and scholars prior to the discovery of the Uruk tablet.

left sacks of silver worth ten talents in trust with Gabael, the brother of Gabri, in the land of Media. 15. When Enemessar. [Sargon II] died, his son Sennacherib came to rule in his stead, and the roads to Media passed out of control; and I was no longer able to journey there.

So Tobit's marriage, the birth of his son Tobiah, and his blossoming career most likely occurred under Sargon II's reign (722 BC-705 BC).

SARGON II REVISITED AS A POTENTIAL CANDIDATE FOR ENEMESSAR?

Tobit 1:15. When Enemessar died, his son Sennacherib¹² came to rule in his stead, and the roads to Media passed out of control; and I was no longer able to journey there. 16. In the days of Enemessar, I gave alms to my relatives, to those of my people. 17. I shared my food with the hungry and my clothing with the naked; and if I saw the dead body of anyone of my nation tossed beyond the wall of Nineveh, I would bury it. 18. I also buried anyone whom Sennacherib had put to death after he came back in flight from Judea in the days when the King of Heaven passed judgment on him for all his blasphemies.¹³ In his anger he slew many of the Israelites, but I would steal their bodies and bury them; when Sennacherib looked for them, he did not find them.

Sennacherib (705-681 BC) [Hebrew: סַנְחַרְיַב; Greek: Σενναχηρ(ε)ῖμ; Latin: Sennacherim] is known in history to be the son of Sargon II who reigned from 722-705 BC. So is it possible that Sargon II is Enemessar and not Tiglath-Pileser? Did Sargon II invade Naphtali and deport any of its citizens to Nineveh? Based on the Bible and Sargon's records reviewed previously, I would say no!

So, if Sargon II didn't conquer and deport Naphtali and is not the best candidate for being Enemessar, although he was Sennacherib's father; and Tiglath-Pileser did conquer and deport Naphtali, and is the best candidate for being Enemessar, although he was Sennacherib's grandfather, how do we reconcile this issue of Sennacherib being Enemessar's son and not Tiglath-Pileser's grandson in the text of *Tobit*?

If we consider that the original version of the *Book of Tobit* was written in Hebrew or Aramaic, and that the *Septuagint* and *Vetus Latina* are translations into Greek and Latin respectively, then we have a perfect solution. In Hebrew the word for "son" is בֶּן, *ben*; in Aramaic ܒܪ, *bar*.¹⁴ Interestingly, the definition of ܒܪ / בֶּן is not restricted to "son." It can also mean "grandson/descendant" as in *Genesis 29:5* *And he said unto them,*

Know ye Laban the "son" of Nahor? [בֶּן נַחֹר Hebrew Masoretic text, ܒܪ ܢܚܘܪ Aramaic Peshitta text] *And they said, We know him.* However, Laban is actually the grandson of Nahor and the son of Bethuel (cf. *Genesis 22:20-22*) and the brother of Rebekah (cf. *Genesis 24:28*). So, it could be said, similarly, that Sennacherib could be called Tiglath-Pileser's "son."

However, then we are stymied by *Tobit 1:15*, *When Enemessar died, his son Sennacherib came to rule in his stead* because Tiglath-Pileser III died in 727 BC, Shalmaneser in 722 BC, and Sargon II in 705 BC. Sennacherib only assumed the throne in 704 BC. So if that were the only criterion, Enemessar would be identified with Sargon II. That is the currently accepted identity of Enemessar by the Roman Catholic Church. But Sargon fails the other two major historical criteria discussed previously.

How do we reconcile this? Could "Enemessar" be a title instead of a name? The name/title *Sargon* comes only from its pronunciation in Hebrew from *Isaiah 20:1* (see page 3b). In Akkadian Sargon II's name is 𒍪 𒍪 𒍪 𒍪 *šarru-ukīn* or *šarru-kēn*, Although *šarru* in Akkadian (east Semitic) means "king" and is similar to the Hebrew *sár* שָׂר for king, the meaning of *Enemes-* is unknown. *šarru-kēn* has been interpreted adjectivally, as 'the established or legitimate' king. In other words, *Enemes-* might be an adjective like *šarru-* and form a title with *-sar* -- in which case it could be applied to both Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II since their ascents to their thrones were irregular and the details nebulous. So to be called a *rightful* king or the *ruling* king, etc., would lend legitimacy to these two monarchs who rose to the throne via coups. In which case both rulers may have been quite happy to be called a "rightful" king. Otherwise, we would have to ascribe these historical issues to confusion on the part of various redactors in the several centuries after *Tobit* and his son Tobiah wrote down their personal histories. Errors could have easily arisen among less knowledgeable redactors, especially since Sargon was not mentioned as a king of Assyria in the historical books of the Old Testament. Where his name could/should appear in 4 Kingdoms 17:6 and 18:11 (see page 3 above) we only have "the king of Assyria" and "they". Secondly, if the redactors of the Old Latin and Vulgate were considering that Enemessar was Shalmaneser, and didn't know about Sargon, they could also have assumed that Sennacherib was Enemessar's, i.e., Shalmaneser's son. Thus, a combination of two errors by early redactors of the Latin text could have resulted in what we have in *Tobit 1*. Since we don't have fragments of an Aramaic or

12. Sennacherib was king of Assyria from 705-681 BC. He made Nineveh his capital in 705 BC. Tobit would have been about 34 years old at this time.

13. In 701 BC, King Sennacherib invaded and conquered all of Judea except for Jerusalem. Tobit would have been 38 years old.

14. Sennacherib (705-681 BC) is known in history to be the son [Hebrew = בֶּן, *ben*; Aramaic = ܒܪ, *bar*] of Sargon II and grandson [Hebrew = בֶּן, *ben*; Aramaic = ܒܪ, *bar*] of Tiglath-Pileser, either of whom may be referred to here as *Enemessar*.

THE GOOD WORD

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Hebrew scroll from Cave 4 at Qumran that contain this portion of the text, we don't know what these earliest copies of Tobit's and Tobiah's writings contained nor how they were phrased.

Personally, I favor *Enemessar* to be a representative title applying to both. Thus, we need not dismiss the biblical and Assyrian historical records that favor Tiglath-Pileser III over Sargon II, nor ignore favoring Sennacherib being the "son" of Sargon II over the "grandson" of Tiglath-Pileser III. So, *Enemessar*, were it used as a title instead of a name, may have confused the later translators and redactors of the *Book of Tobit*.

THE DEATH OF TOBIAH, AT AGE 117

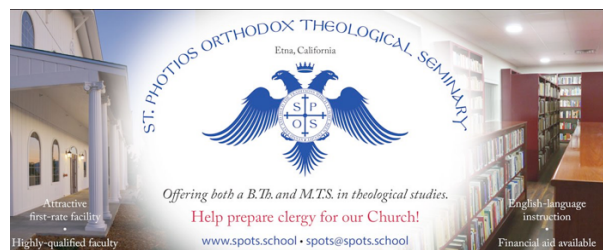
The last alleged historical error from the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* [which states "The reference at the end of the book to the destruction of Nineveh by Nebuchadnezzar and Ahasuerus (14:15) is erroneous"] applies only to the Greek short-recension text *G'* of Tobit. The earlier *G^u* text has *Αχιαχαρος* (Cyaxares) and the *VL* text has *Achicar* (Cyaxares) *rex Medorum* as capturing Babylon [in 612 BC]. The later Greek copyists of the *G'* substituted the better known names of Nabuchadnezzar and Ahasuerus for Cyaxares here. They are the source for this last alleged historical error.

So could Tobit's son Tobiah actually been alive at that time? The answer is "yes."

Tobit 14: 14. *G^u* He [referring to Tobit's son Tobiah] died highly respected at the age of 117 [others: 99, 107, 108, 127]. 15 But before he died, he saw and heard about the destruction of Nineveh [612 BC]. He saw its captives being led into Media, those whom the king of Media, Achiacharus [*Αχιαχαρος*](*Cyaxares*), carried off.

Cyaxares (*Κυαξάρης* is the usual Greek spelling of his name) was the King of Media (NW Iran) and reigned from 625-585 BC. Allied with the Neo-Babylonian King Nabopolassar, Cyaxares breeched the walls of Nineveh, slaughtered the defenders, and captured its inhabitants in 612 BC. The city had just fallen to Cyaxares when Nabopolassar and the Neo-Babylonian army arrived on the scene.

Since Tobiah lived to the age of 117, he could have been born no earlier than 729 BC to be able to have seen the fall of Nineveh. However, his father Tobit would have only been 10 years old at this time. Since Tobit was deported to Nineveh in 732 BC by King Tiglath-Pileser (who reigned until 727 BC), married a woman from his ancestral kindred after the deportation, had a son, and worked in supplying goods for one of the kings (but not Sennacherib), Tobiah more likely was born 15-20 years later, i.e., between 717 BC and 712 BC, so during the reign of Sargon II (722 -705 BC). Tobiah would then most likely have been around 100-105 years old at the time of Cyaxares conquest of Nineveh in 612 B.C. Thus, we could attest that there are no historical errors in the *Book of Tobit*. ❖ ❖ ❖



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