

Who's Who in the Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete

Pictures help us think, digest, and understand the truth given to us. In the Great Canon, St Andrew of Crete pictures most of the characters and episodes of the Old Testament and a few from the New, and reflects on each of them in terms of repentance. It used to be that most people were familiar with these names— Korah, Dathan and Abiram, Hophni, or Phinehas— and could tell you all about them. Unfortunately we are not so literate, and the names can just fly by and not mean anything to us. We could be virtually untouched by the canon! So it's a good idea to get to know those to whom St Andrew is referring. As he tells their stories, we see our own sins and failings, and learn about the cure. Here we'll highlight a few of the characters mentioned in each Ode of the Canon.

Before doing so, though, a word about the Canon and its structure might be helpful. 'Canon' means 'rule'. In this case, the rule consists of eight particular poems from the Old Testament and two (taken together) from the New, which are related to key moments in the history of salvation. The Church refers to these biblical passages as the 'Nine Odes' or 'Canticles'. For each Ode, a composer— in this case, St Andrew of Crete, who died in the early 700s— has provided a number of short hymns, called 'Troparia', which are to be sung between its verses. The first troparion is called the 'Irmos' or 'Hinge' because it always links the theme of the Ode to the troparia that follow it, and it is always sung. The actual biblical poems themselves are usually not read today, but only the Irmoi and Troparia, along with a refrain— here, 'Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me'. The Church uses hundreds of these canons in its daily services, especially at the Midnight Office and at Matins; this one by St Andrew is one of the earliest, longest, and finest of them all.

Ode I

Adam and Eve

The first people mentioned of course are Adam and Eve. In Ode I we read:

'I have rivaled in transgression Adam the first-formed man, and I have found myself stripped naked of God, of the eternal kingdom and its joy, because of my sins.

'Instead of the visible Eve, I have the Eve of the mind: the passionate thought in my flesh, showing me what seems sweet; yet whenever I taste from it, I find it bitter'.

St Hesychius of Sinai wrote, 'If you make yourself fulfill [God's commandments] in thought, you will rarely find it necessary to toil over the fulfilling of them in action'. That's what St Andrew means when he refers to the Eve as the mind.

Mentioning Adam and Eve at the beginning of the canon, St Andrew tells us of the results of sin (separation from eternal life) and the cause of sin (turning from God in our thinking).

St John of Kronstadt teaches that we do not actually think with our mind. The thoughts we have in our heads are generated in our hearts, or are the result of suggestions by the devil. One of the things which the elder Simeon told the Mother of God was that her child 'a sign that shall be denied. . . that the *thoughts* of many *hearts* may be revealed'.

'I have become a slave to pleasure through slothfulness of mind'. We've all seen bumper stickers that read, 'Don't believe everything you think'. If we believe everything we think, and, in our laziness, do not weigh our thoughts against the commandments of Christ, we become enslaved. By being aware of our thoughts, we can come to know what lies in our heart. We may not like what we come to know, but at least our work becomes clear.

The rest of the Old Testament figures mentioned in the Canon represent the ways we sin against God in thought word, and deed.

Cain

'By my own free choice I have incurred the guilt of Cain's murder. I have killed my conscience, bringing the flesh to life and making war upon the soul by my wicked actions'.

Adam and Eve's first son Cain was half-hearted in his devotions and sacrifice to God. He didn't give his best. He gave lip service, empty words, to God; he did not give his heart. He knew that the sacrifice he was making was only an outward show, but 'killed' his conscience by not listening to it. However, God was not mocked; he saw the shallowness of Cain's efforts and therefore did not accept the sacrifice and reward Cain.

Cain's jealousy led to murder. Jealousy comes when we are ungrateful and have not given with a sincere and humble heart. When we feel jealous, it is a sign that we got caught in our ingratitude and we don't like it. We got caught trying to give our second best but still expecting to receive the best reward. We kill our conscience which tries to tell us that our disappointment is our own fault. Of course, our disappointment, our dissatisfaction, must be someone's fault so we turn on our brother.

Abel

Of course, Cain is mentioned in contrast to his brother Abel, who offered to God an unblemished lamb. St Andrew writes:

'O Jesus, I have not been like Abel in his righteousness. Never have I offered Thee acceptable gifts or godly actions, a pure sacrifice or an unblemished life.'

We probably do not murder outwardly as did Cain, but we all know the judgments and anger that accompany jealousy. Our Lord tells us in the Sermon on the Mount that, "You have heard that it was said by those of old, "Thou shalt not kill". But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be in danger of judgment.'

Ode II

Lamech (descendent of Cain)

In Ode II, we hear of Lamech. There are a few Lamechs in the Old Testament. This one was a descendant of Cain.

Like Cain's, Lamech's sin was murder. We can read the biblical story as saying that whereas Cain killed one person, Lamech killed two people— a "man" and a "young man" (Gn 4.23). For St Andrew, these are body and mind. The canon reads:

'To whom shall I liken thee, O soul of many sins? Alas! to Cain and to Lamech. For thou hast stoned thy body to death with thine evil deeds, and killed thy mind with thy disordered longings.

St Andrew then mentions four righteous men.

'Call to mind, my soul, all who lived before the Law [of Moses]. Thou hast not been like Seth, or followed Enosh or Enoch, who was translated to heaven, or Noah; but thou

art found destitute, without a share in the life of the righteous'.

After Abel was murdered and Cain exiled, Eve bore a son named Seth. Seth had a son named Enosh. *'And to Seth also there was born a son; and he called his name Enosh: then began men to call upon the name of the Lord'* (Genesis 4.26).

In the seventh generation after Adam, Enoch was born. This Enoch did not die as we normally do. When he was three hundred sixty five years old, he was 'translated'— *'Enoch walked with God: and he was not, for God translated him'* (Genesis 5.24). We can't say what 'translated' means, but Enoch was true to the meaning of his name 'dedicated'.

Enoch had a very famous son, the oldest recorded person in history— Methuselah.

Genesis speaks of two people named Enoch. The first was Cain's son. He was dedicated to this world, symbolized by his connection to a worldly city. The second was the one mentioned by St Andrew, who was dedicated to God and was found worthy to enter the heavenly city.

Noah

The fourth righteous man mentioned in canticle two is Noah. We all know Noah. He was a righteous man in the midst of a very unrighteous society. Only Noah and his wife, his three sons and their wives survived the Great Flood. The Canon is about sin and failure, and new beginnings.

Ode III

Lot

Ode III begins with a reference to Abraham's nephew, Lot:

'O my soul, flee like Lot to the mountains, and take refuge in Zoar before it is too late. Flee from the flames, my soul, flee from the burning heat of Sodom, flee from the destruction by the fire of God'.

Three angels were sent by God to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their extreme wickedness. Before destroying the cities, angels visited Abraham, who was living on the Plain of Mamre, not far from Sodom and Gomorrah. During this visit, the angels told Abraham and Sarah (99 and 89 years old at the time, respectively) that Sarah would bear a son who would be called Isaac. This incident is the inspiration behind the icon we know of as the 'Holy Trinity' or, more correctly, as the 'Hospitality of Abraham', which depicts not the Trinity itself but the *theology* of the Trinity.

Abraham knew that Lot lived in Sodom and bargained with the angels not to destroy the cities if they found fifty good people there. They agreed, and Abraham kept bargaining, lowering the number of righteous people required to grant a reprieve. The angels finally agreed that if ten righteous people were in the cities they would not destroy them.

As it turned out, only four good people were found—Lot and his wife and two daughters. The angels told them to flee to the mountains and not look back. This is when Lot's wife disobeyed and looked back. She turned into a pillar of salt.

Toward the end of Ode III are more references to Lot and his wife:

'Do not look back, my soul, and so be turned into a pillar of salt. Fear the example of the people of Sodom, and take refuge in Zoar. Flee, my soul, like, Lot, from the burning of sin; flee from Sodom and Gomorrah; flee from the flame of every brutish desire.'

Lot escaped destruction because he fled from temptation and did not look back. So often we entertain sinful thoughts, thinking we can then discard them at will. The Fathers of the Church urge us not to attempt to fight temptation by our own strength but to immediately flee to Christ.

The wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah is generally considered to center around unrestrained sexual desire which leads to depravity. This is clear from the narrative as given in Genesis 19 and also from the reference made in the epistle of St Jude. But also Ezekiel said: 'Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom: pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness. . . . nor did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy' (Ezekiel 16.49).

Ode III also refers to the three sons of Noah: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

'O my soul, thou hast followed Ham, who mocked his father. Thou hast not covered thy neighbor's shame, walking backwards with averted face. O wretched soul, thou hast not inherited the blessing of Shem, nor hast thou received, like Japheth, a spacious domain in the land of forgiveness.'

These verses refer to an incident that happened some time after the ark had landed and Noah had planted a vineyard. He got drunk and lay naked in his tent. His son, Ham, saw him and made fun of his father in front of Shem and Japheth. Unlike Ham, Shem and Japheth did their best to shield their father and 'cover his sin' by taking his cloak and walking backward to cover him without looking. Ham was mocking the faults and weakness of his father. In the Prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian,

which we say many times during Lent, we beg God to prevent us from committing this serious sin.

'Yea, O Lord, King, grant me to see my failing and not condemn my brother, for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages.'

When Noah realized what had happened, he cursed the descendants of Ham and blessed the descendants of Shem and Japheth.

Abraham

'O my soul, depart from sin, from the land of Haran, and come to the land that Abraham inherited, which flows with incorruption and eternal life.'

Abraham probably does not need too much of an introduction. When he was seventy-five, living with his Father in the land of Haran, God told him, 'Leave your country, and your kindred, and your father's house, and go to a land that I will show you'.

So far we have been presented with two righteous men who were told to leave the place they were living. This is like the fact that we have ingrained ways of thinking and perceiving that need to be left behind. Prayer and the examination of our own thoughts and perceptions are required of us in the spiritual life. This is part of leaving the old man and allowing Christ to make us new. We venture beyond our own 'self-image' into the spiritual unknown, relying on God.

Ishmael

'Thou hast heard, O my soul, be watchful! How Ishmael was driven out as the child of a bondwoman. Take heed, lest the same thing happen to thee because of thy lust. O my soul, thou hast become like Hagar, the Egyptian; thy free choice has been enslaved, and thou hast borne as thy child a new Ishmael, stubborn willfulness.'

Abraham was married to Sarah who was barren. At Sarah's suggestion, Abraham had a son by Sarah's maid, Hagar, and this son is Ishmael. In the Canon, Egypt is usually taken as a symbol of evil, or of the passionate, unregenerate life. Thoughts and actions that arise from our passions enslave us. This is a reoccurring theme in the canon.

Ode IV

Jacob

At a crucial time in his life, Jacob had a dream of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with angels (God's messengers) going up and down. The Canon challenges us to prepare for God's help by practicing the good:

'Thou knowest, my soul, the ladder that was shown to Jacob, reaching up from earth to heaven. Why hast thou not provided a firm foundation for it through thy godly actions?'

Leah and Rachel

Leah and Rachel were Jacob's two wives, who gave birth to the twelve sons who would be the ancestors of all the Israelites. Jacob had to work for his uncle Laban for seven years in order to marry Rachel, but Laban gave him Leah instead, and he had to work another seven years for Rachel.

'By the two wives, understand action and knowledge in contemplation. Leah is action, for she had many children; and Rachel is knowledge, for she endured great toil. And without toil, O my soul, neither action nor contemplation will succeed'.

Once again, St Andrew enjoins us to be watchful rather than slothful with our thoughts.

Esau

'Thou hast rivaled Esau the hated, O my soul, and given the birthright of thy first beauty to the supplanter; thou hast lost thy father's blessing and in thy wretchedness been twice supplanted, in action and in knowledge. Therefore repent now'.

Esau came home from an unsuccessful hunting trip very hungry and asked Jacob for a bowl of lentil soup. Jacob said he would give Esau the soup if Esau would give him his birthright. Esau, so unwilling to suffer a little, traded his birthright in order to appease his appetite. This is a good lesson for us during Lent.

Ode V

Reuben

'In my misery I have followed Reuben's example, and have devised a wicked and unlawful plan against the Most High God, defiling my bed as he defiled his father's'.

Reuben slept with his father's concubine, and lost his inheritance as firstborn.

Joseph

'I confess to Thee, O Christ my King: I have sinned, I have sinned like the brethren of Joseph, who once sold the fruit of purity and chastity. As a figure of the Lord, O my soul, the righteous and gentle Joseph was sold into bondage by his brethren; but thou hast sold thyself entirely to sin'.

Moses

'O miserable soul, thou hast not struck and killed the Egyptian mind, as did Moses the great. Tell me, then, how

wilt thou go to dwell through repentance in the wilderness, empty of passions? Moses the great went to dwell in the desert. Come, seek to follow his way of life, my soul, that in contemplation thou mayest attain the vision of God in the bush'.

When Moses was a prominent man in Egypt, he saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite. Moses killed the Egyptian. Here, the Israelite represents the heart that belongs to God, and the Egyptian represents the thoughts of the old, unregenerated man.

Korah, Dathan, Abiram; Aaron, Hophni and Phinehas

'Aaron offered to God fire that was blameless and undefiled, but Hophni and Phinehas brought to Him, as thou hast done, my soul, strange fire and a polluted life'.

'Like Dathan and Abiram, O my soul, thou hast become a stranger to thy Lord; but with all thy heart cry out 'spare me,' that the earth may not open and swallow thee up'.

Korah, Dathan and Abiram were the leaders of a revolt against Moses. When the Israelites were a short distance from the Promised Land, Moses sent six pairs of men, one man from each tribe, as 'spies' into the Promised Land. They were to get a sense of the people who inhabited the land and of the land itself. Five pairs, (ten men) returned with glowing reports of the land, but told Moses that the people were strong and fierce, with many chariots. It would be impossible to defeat them. Only one pair, Joshua and Caleb, said that although it was true that the people were great, the Israelites could conquer them with God's help. The Israelites shouted down Joshua and Caleb and despaired of entering into the new land. God told them that, having refused, they would wander in the desert for 40 years, until that whole generation was dead. So, of the 600,000 people who initially left Egypt, only Joshua and Caleb actually entered the Promised Land.

God told Moses to lead the people south, away from the Promised Land. This is when Korah and his friends led a revolt. God responded to their revolt by opening the earth which swallowed them and their entire families. When the rest of the Israelites saw what had happened, they blamed Moses and spoke against him, and God sent a plague to kill the people. Aaron, however, took a censer and ran among the people, making atonement for them. The plague stopped.

Hophni and Phinehas were the two sons of the high priest, Eli. The sons used their position to steal from the people and to do all kinds of immoral things. Eli knew what was happening but did nothing except scold his sons. A prophet told Eli that his sons would be killed for their evil. When Eli was told his sons had been killed by

the Philistines, he died also. Eli is mentioned in the next Ode.

Ode VI

Eli the Priest

'Thou hast drawn upon thyself, O my soul, the condemnation of Eli, the priest: thoughtlessly thou hast allowed the passions to work evil within thee, just as he permitted his children to commit transgressions'.

Ephraim

The prophet Hosea compared Israel to a raging, maddened heifer, and said that Ephraim, joined with idols, laid snares in his own path (Hosea 4.16-17).

Joshua, the son of Nun

'Like Joshua, the son of Nun, search and spy out, my soul, the land of thine inheritance and take up thy dwelling within it, through obedience to the law. Rise up and make war against the passions of the flesh, as Joshua against Amalek, ever gaining the victory over the Gibeonites, thy deceitful thoughts'.

Joshua was one of the twelve spies sent into the Promised Land. After Moses died, he became the leader of Israel and brought the Israelites into the Promised Land, which St Andrew sees as an image of the promise of the spiritual life.

Joshua led Israel against the Amalekites (descendants of Esau) shortly before the Israelites reached Mount Sinai. After the Israelites had entered the Promised Land and conquered Jericho and Ai, the surrounding peoples were very afraid of them. So the people of Gibeon devised a plan to join forces with several other kingdoms in order to defeat the Israelites. Some of the men of Gibeon dressed themselves in rags, gathered some old dry bread and dried out wineskins and pretended to be emissaries from a distant country. They told a story about how they had heard of the wonders of the Israelites and were seeking to be their servants. The leaders of Israel, including Joshua, were deceived. The scriptures say that the Israelites fell for the ruse and 'took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord'.

Joshua finally realized the plot, gathered his armies together and did battle with the opposing kingdoms. It was a very long and difficult battle, so long in fact that Joshua had to pray that the sun stop in the sky so he would have enough time to win. But since he had made peace with the Gibeonites, he did not destroy them, but made them servants of the Israelites.

Manoah

'O my soul, thou hast heard how Manoah of old beheld the Lord in a vision, and then received from his barren wife the fruit of God's promise. Let us imitate him in his devotion'.

Manoah was the father of Samson, the child who was promised to free Israel from the yoke of the Philistines.

Samson

'Emulating Samson's slothfulness, O my soul, thou hast been shorn of the glory of thy works, and through love of pleasure thou hast betrayed thy life to the alien Philistines, surrendering thy chastity and blessedness'.

Samson was dedicated to the Lord from his birth, and as a sign of this, his hair was never to be cut. He loved women though. So, when the Philistines couldn't conquer him, his Philistine woman Delilah got him to tell her his secret— if his long hair was shorn, he would lose his strength. Once again we are given an example of the enslavement which follows slothfulness.

Barak and Jephthah with Deborah

'Barak and Jephthah the captains, with Deborah who had a man's courage, were chosen as judges of Israel. Learn bravery from their mighty acts, O my soul, and be strong'.

After the death of Joshua, the Israelites were disloyal to their covenant with God, then conquered by the Canaanites, rescued by God, became disloyal again, and were rescued again, over and over. Jabin was a Canaanite king; Deborah, a prophetess and the 'judge', or governor, of Israel. She called together two good men, Barak and Jephthah, who inspired the people to fight for their freedom.

Jael, who pierced Sisera

'O my soul, thou knowest the manly courage of Jael, who of old pierced Sisera through his temple and brought salvation to Israel with the nail of her tent. In this thou mayest see a prefiguring of the Cross'.

Sisera was the captain of the armies of Canaan. When the Israelites routed the armies of Canaan, Sisera fled to the Kenites, with whom the Canaanites were at peace. He was invited into the house of a man named Heber. As Sisera was resting, Heber's wife Jael took a tent-peg and hammered it into his head. This made the defeat of the Canaanites complete.

Gideon

'O my soul, consider the fleece of Gideon, and receive the dew from heaven; bend down like a doe and drink the water that flows from the Law, when its letter is wrung out for thee through study'.

Gideon sought to know God's will by placing a fleece on the ground overnight. When the fleece was wet with dew but the ground was dry— or, a second time, when the ground was wet but the fleece dry— Gideon saw what he must do. St Andrew urges us to 'wring out' the waters of grace that flow from the Scriptures.

Hannah and her son Samuel

'Hannah, who lovest self-restraint and chastity, when speaking to God moved her lips in praise, but her voice was not heard; and she who was barren bore a son worthy of her prayer'.

'Great Samuel, son of Hannah, was born at Ramah and brought up in the house of the Lord; and he was numbered among the judges of Israel. Eagerly follow his example, O my soul, and before thou judgest others, judge thine own works'.

Ode VII

Saul

'When Saul once lost his father's asses, in searching for them he found himself proclaimed as king. But watch, my soul, lest unknown to thyself thou prefer thine animal appetites to the Kingdom of Christ'.

Saul was anointed king by Samuel, but in the end he proved disobedient and lost both his kingship and his life.

David

'David, the forefather of God, once sinned doubly, pierced with the arrow of adultery and the spear of murder. But thou, my soul, art more gravely sick than he. For worse than any acts are the impulses of thy will, David once joined sin to sin, adding murder to fornication; yet then he showed at once a twofold repentance. But thou, my soul, hast done worse things than he, yet thou hast not repented before God'.

David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of his chief warriors. To cover up the deed, he arranged to have Uriah betrayed and killed in battle. The prophet Nathan confronted him, and David repented, writing Psalm 50(51), 'Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy'.

Uzzah

'When the ark was being carried in a cart and the ox stumbled, Uzzah did no more than touch it, but the wrath of God smote him. O my soul, flee from his presumption and respect with reverence the things of God'.

Shortly after being crowned king, David started making plans to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, his

new capital. It was put in a cart drawn by two oxen. At one point the cart seemed to be tipping and Uzzah, one of the sons of Abinadab, stretched out his hand to steady the Ark. He was immediately killed, because none could touch the Ark except the High Priest.

Absalom and Ahitophel

'Thou hast heard of Absalom, and how he rebelled against nature; thou knowest of the unholy deeds by which he defiled his father David's bed. Yet thou hast followed him in his passionate and sensual desires.

'Thy free dignity, O my soul, thou hast subjected to thy body; for thou hast found in the enemy another Ahitophel, and hast agreed to all his counsels. But Christ Himself has brought them to nothing and saved thee from them all'.

Absalom was one of the sons of David and was very popular— 'in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him'. However, Absalom's goodness and beauty were all on the outside. Inside he was full of pride, ambition and deceit. He rebelled and fought against his father.

Ahitophel was one of David's counselors and, like Absalom, highly respected. When Absalom rebelled, Ahitophel joined him. Together they forced David to leave Jerusalem. Ahitophel wanted to immediately pursue David before he (David) had time to gather those faithful to him. Through a series of events, Ahitophel was delayed and David rebuilt his forces. When Ahitophel saw that he was defeated, he set his house in order and hung himself.

Judas betrayed Christ, as Ahitophel betrayed David. Both Judas and Ahitophel hanged themselves.

Solomon

'Solomon the wonderful, who was full of the grace of wisdom, once did evil in the sight of heaven and turned away from God. Thou hast become like him, my soul, through thy accursed life'.

Solomon was wise, but ambitious, and in building his empire, he married many foreign princesses, building temples for their gods in Jerusalem. This was the beginning of Israel's downfall, which ended in exile.

Rehoboam

'O my soul, thou hast rivaled Rehoboam, who paid no attention to his father's counselors, and Jeroboam, that evil servant and renegade of old. But flee from their example and cry to God: I have sinned, take pity on me'.

Rehoboam was a son of Solomon who became the King of Judah. Some representatives of the northern tribes

came to him asking for lower taxes. Rehoboam told them that he would give his answer in three days. He spoke with his father's counselor's who advised him to be merciful. He then spoke with some men his own age who advised him to make the taxes even greater. He listened to the younger men, who suggested that he tell the people. 'My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions'

Jeroboam was the first king of the northern kingdom, of the Kingdom of Israel. He gained his position through treason and built a rival temple, encouraging the worship of idols in the name of the Lord.

Ahab, Jezebel and Elijah and Zarephath

'Heaven is closed to thee, my soul, and a famine from God has seized thee; for thou hast been disobedient, as Ahab was to the words of Elijah the Tishbite. But imitate the widow Zarepheth and feed the prophet's soul.'

After Solomon, the nation of Israel split into the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the Kingdom of Judah in the south. Ahab, one of the kings of (northern) Israel, together with his wife Jezebel, encouraged the worship of idols. The prophet Elijah was constantly in opposition to them. Elijah brought word that it would not rain for three and a half years as a sign of God's opposition to Ahab and Jezebel.

During the ensuing drought, Elijah fled to a certain widow in the Canaanite town of Zarephath. He met the widow gathering sticks in preparation for a last meal for her son and herself. Asking for bread, he said, 'The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain on the face of the earth'. And thus they survived.

Christ referred to Elijah and the widow of Zarephath in Luke 4.25-26

Hezekiah and Manasseh

'My days have vanished as the dream of one awaking; and so, like Hezekiah, I weep upon my bed, that years may be added to my life. But what Isaiah will come to thee, my soul, except the God of all?'

'By deliberate choice, my soul, thou hast incurred the guilt of Manasseh, setting up the passions as idols and multiplying abominations. But with fervent heart emulate his repentance and acquire compunction.'

Hezekiah was one of the last kings of Judah, and one of the few good kings. He destroyed the idols that his ancestors had set up. But when Jerusalem was being besieged by the Assyrians, Hezekiah despaired. He sought counsel from the prophet Isaiah, who announced that

Jerusalem would be spared and that God would scatter the Assyrians. In the morning the citizens of Jerusalem looked over the city walls and saw 185,000 Assyrians, dead from a plague.

Later when Hezekiah was very sick, Isaiah came to him and told him that he should set his house in order for he was indeed going to die. Hezekiah wept upon his bed and begged again God for mercy. The Lord heard him and granted him fifteen more years of life.

Manasseh was Hezekiah's son, the next king of Judah. He restored the idols and build altars for them even inside the temple itself. Once again God punished Israel; the Assyrians captured Manasseh and took him to Babylon. There Manasseh humbled himself before God and repented. When Manasseh was released from Babylon, he tore down the idols he had previously erected and restored the temple to its proper use. (Some of this is in the Greek Bible (Septuagint) but not in the Hebrew Text.)

Ode VIII

Gehazi

'O wretched soul, always thou hast imitated the polluted thoughts of Gehazi. Cast from thee, at least in thine old age, his love for money. Flee from the fire of hell, turn away from thy wickedness.'

Gehazi was the servant of the prophet Elisha. Elisha had healed a man named Naaman of leprosy. When Naaman wanted to give Elisha some money, the prophet refused. After Naaman left, Gehazi ran after Naaman and made up a story about Elisha having a few visitors and needing some money. Naaman gave two talents to Gehazi. Gehazi thought he had made some easy money, but when he returned to Elisha, the prophet knew what he had done and prophesied that the leprosy of Naaman would now come upon Gehazi.

Uzziah

'Thou hast followed Uzziah, my soul, and hast his leprosy in double form; for thy thoughts are wicked, and thine acts unlawful. Leave what thou hast done, and hasten to repentance.'

Uzziah was one of the kings of Judah and reigned very well, conquering the pagan nations as God had directed and making many improvements in the kingdom. 'But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction' He decided one day that he could act as one of the priests and burn incense upon the altar of incense. The priests and several rulers confronted Uzziah but he rebuked them. As Uzziah continued to swing the censer

in violation of the Law, his face was covered with leprosy.
He died a leper.

Also mentioned are Jonah and the men of Nineveh who repented; Jeremiah, in the muddy pit; and Daniel with the three holy children in the furnace.

Ode IX

Ode IX refers to characters in the Gospels, whose stories we assume are more familiar to those who are attending the Great Canon, so we have not summarized any of these troparia here.