

The Who's Who of The Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete

As we approach Great Lent, the time given to us specifically for repentance, the Church gives us a whole host of images to help us. St. John of Kronstadt teaches that:

“Imagery or symbols are a necessity of human nature in our presently spiritually sensual condition; they explain [by the vision] many things belonging to the spiritual world which we could not know without images and symbols.”

We need pictures to help us think, to help us digest and understand the truths given to us. What St. Andrew of Crete does in the Great Canon written by him, is to bring to remembrance many characters of the Old Testament and a few from the New Testament. In earlier times, people knew the scriptures much more than we do. Mention a name like Korah, Dathan, Hophni or Phinehas and many people would be able to tell you all about them. When they heard these names in St. Andrew's canon, they had the opportunity to be struck in the heart and brought to repentance. Unfortunately we are not that scripturally literate so the names can just fly by and not mean anything to us. We could be virtually untouched by the canon. The reason for this talk is to at least start us on the way to knowing to whom St. Andrew is referring.

However, we need to do more than simply know who all those people are. We need to take the canon personally. Their sins and failings are our sins and failings. That St. Andrew expects us to approach the canon personally is clear from the way he writes it.

Adam and Eve

The first people mentioned are, understandably, Adam and Eve. In Canticle One 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.

And:

“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.”

It is interesting that St. Andrew refers to Eve as the mind. In the 3/16 For Consideration section of the Prologue, there is a quote from St. Hesychius which reads: “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.”

So in the beginning of the canon, St. Andrew, through mentioning Adam and Eve 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 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 “shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

In the prayer read at Midnight office on Sunday morning, there is a phrase which reads something like “I have become a slave to pleasure through slothfulness of mind”. I have even seen a warning on a bumper sticker which 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 such is the spiritual life.

Perhaps the rest of the Old Testament figures mentioned in the canon could be seen as symbolizing the various ways in which we sin against God, in thought word, and deed.

Cain

Cain was half-hearted in his devotions and sacrifice toward 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.

Next mentioned is Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve.

“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.”

However, God was not mocked; He saw the shallowness of Cain’s efforts and therefore did not accept the sacrifice and reward Cain.

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 a life unblemished.”

Some interpreters of the story of Cain and Abel see Cain’s sin as not offering the correct kind of sacrifice; he offered the fruits of his garden, not a lamb as did Abel. This is missing the point. God, of course wants our hearts. Our responsibility is to give our best in all we do.

Cain’s sin could more correctly be seen as jealousy which 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.

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, “Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time ‘Thou shalt not kill’... But I say unto you “Whosoever shall be angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment.”

Mention the school children. Cain and Abel mean “I can’t” and “I am able”. When one of them is not putting their heart in their works, we simply need to ask Cain? or Abel?

Canticle Two

Lamech (descendent of Cain)

In Canticle two, we hear of Lamech. There are a few Lamechs in the Old Testament. This one was a descendant of Cain. Cain had a son named Enoch, and, according to Genesis 4:17, built a city and named it after his son. Enoch had a son named Irad, Irad had a son named Mehujael. Mehujael had a son named Methusael (not to be confused with Methuselah). Finally Methusael had a son named Lamech.

Lamech’s sin was, like Cain, murder. Whereas Cain killed one person, Lamech kills two people – an older man and a young man. 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.

“Through sin, a man ends up destroying his own soul, (the man) and his mind (the young man).”

St. Andrew then mentions four righteous men.

“Call to mind, my soul, all who lived before the Law. Thou hast not been like Seth, or followed Enos or Enoch, who was translated to heaven, or Noah; but thou art found destitute, without a share in the life of the righteous.”

Seth was a son of Adam and Eve born after Abel had been murdered and Cain had been cast away. Seth had a son named Enos. The last verse of the fourth chapter of Genesis reads:

“And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.”

Enos had a son named Cainan. Cainan had a son named Mahalaleel. Mahalaleel had a son named Jared, in turn had a son named Enoch. This second Enoch did not die as men normally do. When he was three hundred five years old, he was “translated.”

I cannot tell you exactly what “translated” means, but Enoch was true to the meaning of his name “dedicated”. The scriptures say: “Enoch walked with God: and he was not, for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). Enoch had a very famous son, the oldest recorded person in history -Methuselah.

We have now been introduced to two people named Enoch. The first Enoch was Cain’s son. He was dedicated to this world, symbolized by his connection to a worldly city. The second

Enoch 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.

Canticle Three

Lot

Canticle three begins with a reference to Lot, Abraham's nephew and the son of Abraham's brother, Haran. Apparently Haran had died and Abraham was looking after Lot in Haran's place.

The reference to Lot in the canon is:

“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.”

This verse of the canon is in reference to the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Three angels were sent by God to destroy these cities for their extreme wickedness. However before destroying the cities, angels first went to visit Abraham who was living on the Plain of Mamre, not too far from Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham offered them wonderful hospitality. It was during this visit that the angels told Abraham and Sarah (99 and 89 years old at the time) that Sarah would bear a son who would be called Isaac. This incident is the inspiration behind the icon we know of as “The Hospitality of Abraham.”

When the angels told Abraham that they were on their way to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham realized that his nephew lived there and asked the angels if they would destroy the cities if they found fifty good people there. They said, “No.” Abraham kept questioning the angels, lowering the number of righteous people required to warrant 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 turn back. This is when Lot's wife disobeyed and turned back. She turned into a pillar of salt. It is very possible that the site of Sodom and Gomorrah is now covered by the Dead Sea.

Toward the end of Canticle three there are more references to Lot. We are urged:

“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.

Canticle three 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 was affected by the fermented grape juice and was found in an embarrassing position. 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”. Ham’s sin was mocking the faults and weakness of others. 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

Canticle three also refers to 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. Abraham was apparently born in Ur, a city in Mesopotamia. After the death of Haran, Abraham’s brother, his father Terah moved his family north to a city known as Haran (perhaps named after Terah’s son). This became their new home. When Abraham was seventy-five, God told him to, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee.”

So far we have been presented with two righteous men who were told to leave the place they were living. This, of course, symbolizes 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. Egypt is usually a symbol of evil, or of the passionate, unregenerate life. Thoughts and actions which arise from the passionate in us enslave us. This is a reoccurring theme in the canon.

Canticle Four

Jacob

“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

“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, we are enjoined to be watchful rather than slothful with our thoughts. If you remember, Jacob had to work for his uncle, Laban, for seven years in order to marry Rachel. He was given Leah instead, so he worked another seven years for Rachel.

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 now repent.”

Do you recall how Esau lost his birthright to Jacob? He 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, in turn, would give him the birthright. Esau, so unwilling to suffer a little, traded his birthright in order to appease his appetite. This is a good lesson for lent.

Canticle Five

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.”

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.”

These passages, of course, refer to the time when while still a prominent man in Egypt, saw an Egyptian guard beating an Israelite. Moses killed the guard, thinking no one had seen him.... In this passage we see an example of Egypt, and Egyptians, as symbols of the old, unregenerated man.

Korah, Datham, 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.” (Then in Canticle six) “Like Datham 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, Datham and Abiram were the leaders of a revolt against Moses. When the Israelites were but a short distance from the Promised Land, Moses sent six pair 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 pair, (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. When the Israelites shouted down Joshua and Caleb and despaired of entering into the new land, God told them that they would wander in the desert for 40 years, until they were all dead. 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 lead a revolt. God responded to their revolt by opening the earth which swallowed them. All their families were also killed. When the rest of the Israelites saw what had happened, they blamed Moses and spoke against him, God then sent a plague to kill the people. Aaron, however, took a censer and ran among the people, making atonement for them. The plague then stopped.

The reference to Hophni and Phinehas concerns the two sons of the priest, Eli. As sons of the priest, they had privileges and responsibilities in the temple. The sons greatly misused their position to steal from the people and do all kinds of immoral things. Eli knew what was happening but did nothing but verbally 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 fell backwards and died also.

Although the reference to Eli is in the next canticle we will quote it here.

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.”

Canticle Six

Ephraim (raging as a maddened heifer)?

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.”

This is a reference to Joshua’s work as one of the twelve spies sent into the Promised Land. We are given a foretaste of heaven when we are faithful to God.

Joshua against the Amalekites (descendants of Esau) was the battle shortly before the Israelites reached Mount Sinai where Moses received the Ten Commandments.

The reference to the Gibeonites concerns something that happened after the Israelites had entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. The Israelites had conquered Jericho and the city of Ai and as a result, the surrounding peoples were very afraid of them. 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, “And the men took of their victuals (believed in the outer appearance), 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.

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.

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.”

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.”

Part of “see-saw days” after the death of Joshua. The Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord and as a result they were conquered by another nation, this time by Jabin, King of the Canaanites. Deborah, a prophetess was the judge of Israel. She called together two good men Barak and Jephthah and they inspired the people to repent and regain 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, this Sisera fled on foot. He went to the Kenites with whom the Canaanites were at peace and was invited into the house of a man named Heber. Heber’s wife, Jael, knew the whole situation and as Sisera was resting, she took a nail 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 hart and drink the water that flows from the Law, when its letter is wrung out for thee through study.”

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 he 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.”

Canticle Seven

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.”

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.”

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.”

While Saul was king and Eli was high priest, the Ark of the Covenant was stolen by the Philistines, the archenemy of the Israelites. When the Ark was brought into the Philistine’s temple where their idol was kept, the idol fell and was smashed. The Ark caused the Philistines all kinds of difficulties so they put it on a cart drawn by two oxen, and pointed the oxen toward Jerusalem. The oxen did not make it all the way to Jerusalem, but stopped about 7 miles short, at the house of a man named, Abinadab. There it stayed there until David was crowned king.

Shortly after being crowned king, David started making plans to return the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. It was put in a cart drawn by two oxen. At one point the cart seemed

to be tipping so Uzzah, one of the sons of Abinadab, stretched out his hand to steady the Ark. He was immediately killed.

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 well respected. The Scriptures say of him: 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, was highly respected. When Absalom decided to turn on his father and take over the throne, 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 to be defeated, he set his house in order and hung himself.

We see here a foreshadowing of events which were to take place in the life of Christ almost a thousand years later. Judas betrayed Christ, just as Ahitophel betrayed David, the king. Both Judas and Ahitophel hung themselves. Psalm 54, which is read at Sixth Hour refers to these events:

“For if mine enemy had reviled me, I might have endured it. And if he that hateth me had spoken boastful words against me I might have hid myself from him. But thou it was, O man of like soul with me, me guide and my familiar friend, thou who together with me didst sweeten my repasts; in the house of God I walked with thee in oneness of mind.”

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.”

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 encouraged the worship of idols.

Ahab, Jezebel and Eliiah and Zarephath

"Heaven is closed to thy, 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."

Ahab was one of the kings of Israel. If you remember, after Solomon's rule the kingdom was divided into the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the Kingdom of Judah in the south. Ahab and his wife, Jezebel encouraged the worship of many different idols. The prophet Elijah, who is also mentioned in the canon, was constantly in opposition to them. Elijah was so enraged by the blasphemers of Ahab that he prayer to God that it would not rain for three and a half years.

At one point Elijah fled because Ahab was going to kill him. God told Elijah to go to a certain widow, Zarephath. He met the widow gathering sticks in preparation for a last meal for her son and herself.

Christ referred to Elias and Zarephath, as recorded in Luke 4:25-26

Hezekiah and Manasseh (mentioned in other services)

"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 kings of Judah, whose capital was Jerusalem. Hezekiah was one of the good kings. He destroyed the idols that had been erected. However, at one point Jerusalem was being besieged by the Assyrians who were conquering all the surrounding area and Hezekiah was despairing. The servants of Hezekiah sought help from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied that Jerusalem would be spared; that God would disburse the Assyrians. Hezekiah begged God for mercy and in the morning the citizens of Jerusalem looked over the city walls and saw 185,000 dead Assyrians.

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 a son of Hezekiah, and therefore the next king of Judah. However, he restored the idols and was very wicked, building altars for idols in the temple itself. Once again God had to send punishment upon the people; 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.

Canticle Eight

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 thought of a way to get some money for himself. He 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.

Christ referred to this incident as recorded in Luke 4:27.

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.