

Three Missing Kings (Part Two)

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Forerunner, "Personal,"

In Part One, we saw that the apostle Matthew's genealogy of Jesus Christ lacks three kings of Judah. However, which three kings are missing is in itself somewhat of a mystery due to the multiple names the kings used. Several of them had similar names, making identification tricky. For this article, we will assume that the kings that failed to make Matthew's list are Joash, Amaziah, and Uzziah. What the Bible says about these three men will provide us with enough information to hypothesize why Matthew did not include them in Jesus' family tree.

To begin, we need to see how the book of II Chronicles introduces these three kings:

- Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba. Joash *did what was right in the sight of the LORD* . . . (II Chronicles 24:1-2; emphasis ours throughout)
- Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. And he *did what was right in the sight of the LORD* . . . (II Chronicles 25:1-2)
- Now all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. . . . Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem, and he *did what was right in the sight of the LORD* . . . (II Chronicles 26:1, 3-4)

These three consecutive kings shared the biblical approbation that they did what was right in the sight of the Lord. Yet, these men, who did what was right in God's sight, were struck from the king-list as ancestors of Jesus

Christ, but downright evil men—Jehoram (Joram), Ahaz, Manasseh, and Amon—remained on it.

Why? Could it be that God wants to draw attention to their stories more than otherwise might be done if their names appeared on the list? If so, we need to look at what Scripture provides about their lives.

Joash

II Chronicles 22:10 reads, “Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal heirs of the house of Judah.” Athaliah, daughter of Israel’s King Ahab and Jezebel and thus the granddaughter of Omri (II Chronicles 22:2), was the wife of Jehoram, king of Judah. Once her son had died by the hand of Jehu, she staged a coup, killing all of Ahaziah’s heirs and taking the throne. She reigned for six years.

But Jehoshabeath, who was the daughter of Jehoram and (perhaps) Athaliah, took Joash, her youngest nephew and still an infant, and hid him from Athaliah’s henchmen, saving his life (II Chronicles 22:12). Evidently, when she saw the carnage taking place, she ran into the nursery, picked up Joash, and put him in one of her own rooms with a nurse. In short order, he was spirited away to the Temple, where he lived in secret for the next six years (II Chronicles 22:12). Jehoshabeath could do this because she had made an excellent marriage to Jehoiada, one of the best high priests in Israelite history.

The young king’s story picks up in II Chronicles 24:1-2, which we will read in full this time:

Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Zibiah of Beersheba. Joash did what was right in the sight of the LORD *all the days of Jehoiada the priest.*

In the life of Joash, Jehoiada proved a powerful influence for good. Joash reigned for forty years, but unfortunately, Jehoiada did not live through its entirety, as II Chronicles 24:15-16 relates:

But Jehoiada grew old and full of days, and he died; he was one hundred and thirty years old when he died. And they buried him in the city of David among the kings.

The Bible does not record that many high priests were buried with the kings of Judah. This honor is quite distinctive. It is a recognition of his being a great, righteous man and a tremendous, positive influence on Joash, as well as an acknowledgment that Jehoiada had actually ruled the kingdom. Despite being the front man as the heir of David, Joash did not really have it in him to be king—but Jehoiada did. We see this to be true in the next verses:

Now after the death of Jehoiada the leaders of Judah came and bowed down to the king. And the king listened to them. Therefore they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served wooden images and idols . . . (II Chronicles 24:17-18)

The wording in the first part of the last sentence implies that these Judahite leaders abandoned the way of life represented by the Temple. We would say that they “left the church.” In other words, the nation’s entire political leadership apostatized, using weak Joash to return to the paganism they had enjoyed under Joash’s grandfather, father, and grandmother. God was not pleased:

. . . and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem because of their trespass. Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them back to the LORD; and they testified against them, but they would not listen. Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah, son of Jehoiada the priest, who stood above the people, and said to them, “Thus says God: ‘Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD so you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He also has forsaken you.’ So they conspired against him, and at the command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD. Thus Joash did not remember the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him . . . (II Chronicles 24:18-22)

Jehoiada was not his biological father, but he had acted as his father. He had reared this king of Judah from his infancy, but Joash appears not to have appreciated all that Jehoiada had done for him.

Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but killed his son; and as he died, [Zechariah] said, “The LORD look on it, and repay!” (II Chronicles 24:22)

This heinous act shows what ingratitude can do to a person’s thinking. Jesus refers to this murder in Matthew 23:35-36 when He says that the Jewish authorities had slain His prophets “from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.”¹ Interestingly, Jesus seems to answer Zechariah’s plea to bring them to justice for his death, saying in verse 36, “Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.”

In conclusion, we could call Joash a “fellow traveler.” He was a leaner, a clinging vine, who did not have the resources within himself to forge his own path. Once Jehoiada died, whenever the pressure of leadership fell on him, he had no one to lean on, and he faltered and declined. Spiritually, he died.

Without Jehoiada, Joash bent whichever way the wind blew. His peers in the realm found him easy to influence, as he would follow the crowd. His character reflected the group of courtiers that he fell in with. When Jehoiada was with him, his beneficial influence made Joash compliant and a good king. But when he was with a bad crowd, men like the idolatrous leaders of Judah, he followed them like a lost puppy, too afraid to buck his peers. Finally, he would not repent when God warned him that he was going astray.

God made him and his counselors account for Zechariah’s death not long thereafter, sending the Syrians against Judah and Jerusalem (II Chronicles 24: 23-24). The Syrian army not only plundered the wealth of the leaders of Judah, but they also killed them. So God punished them for their part in Zechariah’s death. Joash did not escape the divine judgment:

And when they had withdrawn from him (for [the Syrians] left him severely wounded), his own servants conspired against him because of the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest,² and killed

him on his bed. So he died. And they buried him in the City of David, but they did not bury him in the tombs of the kings. (II Chronicles 24:25)

Joash's fate was assassination and the disgrace of not being buried with the kings. It makes for a fascinating contrast to compare him, a scion of David who suffered death at the hands of his servants, with his "father" Jehoiada, a descendant of Aaron whom the people held in such high regard that they buried him among the kings. The one's path led to shame while the other's led to honor.

In the end, we can see Joash's character as merely programmed but not internalized. We might also describe it as reflective of those around him rather than genuinely his. Faith must be grounded within us and personally held. We cannot go through life on someone else's coattails. As Ezekiel 14: 14 teaches, even Noah, Job, and Daniel, three of the most righteous, faithful men in all of history, could save only themselves.

Amaziah

The chronicler writes in II Chronicles 25:2, "And [Amaziah] did what was right in the sight of the Lord, *but not with a loyal* [or, perfect (KJV)] *heart*." This evaluation of his character provides a key to understanding his character.

The first major crisis of his reign concerned his preparations for a military campaign against Edom. He took a census and found that he could assemble 300,000 men from Judah and Benjamin to fight against Judah's perennial foes (verse 5). But it seems that this vast army was not enough for him, so he decided to hire mercenaries from Israel to supplement his forces. God appears not to have been against the war against Edom, but as soon as Amaziah hired the Israelite mercenaries, He stepped in:

But a man of God came to him saying, "O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the LORD is not with Israel—not with any of the children of Ephraim. But if you go, be gone! Be strong in battle! Even so, God shall make you to fall before the enemy; for God has power to help and to overthrow." Then Amaziah said to the man of God, "But what shall we do about the hundred talents

which I have given to the troops of Israel?” And the men of God answered, “The LORD is able to give you much more than this.” So Amaziah discharged the troops that had come to him from Ephraim, to go back home. Therefore their anger was greatly aroused against Judah, and they returned home in great anger.(II Chronicles 25:7-10)

Amaziah obeyed the message from God through His prophet. In verses 11-12, the battle between Judah and Edom occurs, and Amaziah wins a great victory. Then he does something that defies logic:

Now it was so, after Amaziah came from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the people of Seir, set them up to be his gods, and bowed down before them, and burned incense to them. (II Chronicles 25:14)

This reaction is hard to comprehend! God gave him a great victory over the Edomites and their gods, and instead of praising and worshipping the God of Israel, he decides to adopt the idols of Edom as his gods. What was he thinking? God responds as we might expect:

Therefore the anger of the LORD was aroused against Amaziah, and He sent him a prophet who said to him, “Why have you sought the gods of the people, which could not rescue their own people from your hand?” So it was, as he talked with him, that the king said to him, “Have we made you the king’s counselor? Cease! Why should you be killed?” Then the prophet ceased and said, “I know that God has determined to destroy you because you have done this and have not heeded my advice.” (II Chronicles 25:15-16)

In other words, Amaziah would not take correction and threatened to kill God’s prophet if he continued to criticize him for his actions. Though he had followed the prophet’s advice earlier, the king is now beginning to expose his disloyal heart.

Feeling strong, Amaziah decides to challenge Israel, whose angry mercenaries had killed three thousand Judahites after being dismissed from Judah’s service—not a very smart move. For one thing, it pitted Judah with

two tribes against Israel with its ten tribes. Joash, king of Israel, was justifiably contemptuous of Amaziah's challenge, writing him in the form of a parable:

The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, "Give your daughter to my son as wife"; and a wild beast that was in Lebanon passed by and trampled the thistle. (II Chronicles 25:18)

In the parable, Amaziah (Judah) is the thistle, and Joash (Israel) is the cedar. A cedar is a mighty, towering tree, while a thistle is so weak that a forest animal can trample it to smithereens and scatter it just by walking by. Joash's parable is a taunt and a warning. Joash tells him explicitly what he means: "Indeed you say that you have defeated the Edomites, and your heart is lifted up to boast. Stay at home now; why should you meddle with trouble, that you should fall—you and Judah with you?" (II Chronicles 25:19).

Amaziah, in his pride, refuses to listen. The chronicler interjects that God inspired his refusal because He needed to punish the king for taking Edomite gods as his own (verse 20). Amaziah takes his forces into battle against Israel at Beth Shemesh, and he and his army are smashed just as the king of Israel had predicted. Amaziah experiences further humiliation: Not only was he captured during the battle, but the Israelites also demolished a large section of Jerusalem's wall and took the Temple's valuables back to Samaria (verses 23-24).

Like his father Joash, Amaziah comes to a violent end years later:

After the time that Amaziah turned away from following the LORD, they [likely a group of nobles] made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish and killed him there. Then they brought him on horses and buried him with his fathers in the City of Judah. (II Chronicles 25: 27-28)

So, for the second time in as many generations, the king of Judah is assassinated. The conspirators held Amaziah in such contempt that they killed him, tied him over the back of a horse, and sent his body back to

Jerusalem for burial. Another king suffers an ignominious end, although he at least had the honor of burial among the former kings of Judah.

In terms of character, Amaziah was unstable, like Joash, reversing his early loyalty to God on a dime. He wanted victory and glory, and when God gave it to him, he failed to see that God was its source and absurdly chose to worship Edomite gods. Instead of listening to God's prophet, he threatened him with death. He foolishly challenged a far stronger Israelite army, expecting the same results he had had against the Edomites, not realizing the Source of his power had become his adversary. And apparently, he never learned his lesson, disenchanting his nobles until they decided to rid themselves of him.

We could compare him to the man in Jesus' parable (Luke 14:28-30), who began to build, seemingly well. However, his early success went to his head, and like a piece of overripe fruit, he began to turn rotten. He dropped God for idols. Like the man in the parable, he did not have what it took to finish what he had started.

Unsteady in character and conduct, he was a semi-religious man who only wanted what faithfulness could get him. He was sufficiently pious early in life, but that early piety did not justify his later pride and self-indulgence.

We are beginning to see that the flaw in these men is that they all started well but did not finish well.

Uzziah

Perhaps Uzziah's story is the most tragic of all. Note the chronicler's evaluation: "And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, *according to all that his father, Amaziah, had done*" (**II Chronicles 26:4**). **He does not even compare Uzziah** to David but to his father. As we just saw, Amaziah's life did not end well, though he started fine.

Uzziah seems to have followed in Joash's footsteps: "He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper" (II Chronicles 26:5). Joash

sought God while Jehoiada the priest lived. Now another strong priest, who, as the margin says, understood the fear of God, steered Uzziah in the right direction. As long as Uzziah had this righteous guidance, God helped him with victories over surrounding nations, bringing him fame and prosperity.

Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate, at the Valley Gate, and at the corner buttress of the wall; and then he fortified them. And he built towers in the desert. He dug many wells, for he had much livestock, both in the lowlands and the plains. He also had farmers and vinedressers in the mountains, and in Carmel, for he loved the soil. Moreover, Uzziah had an army of fighting men who went to war by companies [a standing army]. (II Chronicles 26: 9-11)

The chronicler then describes his officer corps, the size of his army, and his efforts to arm it and develop advanced weaponry. The record of his early reign concludes, “So his fame spread far and wide, for he was marvelously helped till he became strong” (verse 15).

However, upon reaching the zenith of power and fame, he plunges toward his nadir; the butterfly turns into a worm: “But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the LORD his God by entering the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense” (II Chronicles 26:16). Uzziah presumptuously disregarded God’s Word, for it said that only the priests could perform this responsibility.

Success after success spoiled his character. He became arrogant, filled with inordinate self-esteem. In his pride, he tried to emulate the Oriental kings around him, who were their nations’ high priests as well. But God had purposely separated the two offices within Israel. What was the result of his flagrant presumption? First, the priests tried to stop him from his foolish act:

So Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him were eighty priests of the LORD—valiant men. And they withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, “It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to

burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed!
You shall have no honor from the LORD God.” (II Chronicles 26:17-18)

In his overweening pride, Uzziah’s reaction was rage. The priests had challenged his authority! Was he not the mighty king of Judah? It appears he felt that he had become infallible and invincible. The chronicler relates the disastrous ending of the tale:

Then Uzziah became furious; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the incense altar. [He was right in front of the curtain before the Holy of Holies!] And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and there, on his forehead, he was leprous; so they thrust him out of that place. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the LORD had struck him. King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, because he was a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD. Then Jotham his son was over the king’s house, judging the people of the land. (II Chronicles 26:19-21)

Josephus adds an interesting postscript to the story, though it is not clear if he is correct or not. He writes that the earthquake the prophet Amos mentions in Amos 1:1 occurred when Uzziah invaded the Holy Place. Moreover, he says that the shaking tore the sanctuary’s roof, and a ray of sunlight pierced the Temple, striking Uzziah in his forehead. When the sunbeam disappeared, leprosy remained. Tradition says this was the hand of God, showing His displeasure with Uzziah’s presumptuous pride.

Again, we see a king who started marvelously but faltered and failed along the way. Like Amaziah, when confronted with the truth of his sin, he refused to repent, doubling down with anger and threats. God humbled him for the rest of his life. He had sought glory and fame, and he had to live with shame and loneliness for about another decade before he died. II Chronicles 26:23 records that he was buried with his fathers but separated from them in the field because “they said, ‘He is a leper.’”

The Need for Repentance

All three of these kings hardened their hearts. They all rejected God's Word and refused to repent. God wanted them to return to Him, but their intransigence forced His hand:

“Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the Lord God, “and not that he should turn from his ways and should live? But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered . . . (Ezekiel 18:23-24)

Is God hard? Is He austere and unmerciful? Does God owe us salvation and eternal life? Is He bound to give us blessings regardless of our conduct, despite the direction of our lives? No, our choices decide our fate.

All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die. Yet you say, “The way the Lord is not fair.” Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways, which are not fair? When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies. Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive. Because he considers and turns away from all the transgressions he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. (Ezekiel 18:24-28)

God demands individual responsibility. He never condones sin nor grants license for anyone to disobey His commands. The subject here is not about transgressions done out of weakness or ignorance but those committed as a way of life with knowledge of wrongdoing. He judges such sins seriously. Yet, even for such sins, God always desires and allows the sinner to repent.

As we see in the examples of these kings, He will always chase after the sinner with His Word and allow him time to repent. He always leaves the

door open for a sinner who will return to Him. But eventually, the mind becomes set (Ecclesiastes 8:11), the conscience becomes seared (I Timothy 4:2), and repentance becomes impossible.

Blotting Out a Sinner's Name

At some point, a sinner will no longer change, and God says that He then makes a final judgment. He tells Moses after he had offered his own life for the sins of Israel, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book” (Exodus 32:33). God enters names into the Book of Life, and He has the prerogative to erase names from it as well—a sobering thought indeed.

In Deuteronomy 29:9, Moses addresses the people: “Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do.” We would do well to consider what he says in terms of our place under the New Covenant and extract the principle.

All of you stand today before the LORD your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones and your wives—also the stranger who is in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water—that you may enter into covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath, which the LORD your God makes with you today, that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, but also with him who stands here with us today before the LORD our God, as well as with him who is not here with us today . . . (Deuteronomy 29:10-15)

What we have done in agreeing to the covenant does not end with us, but it reverberates into the future. We must consider it over the long term.

. . . (for you know that we dwelt in the land of Egypt and that we came through the nations which you passed by, and you saw their abominations and their idols which were among them—wood and stone and silver and gold); so that there may not be among you man

or woman, family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood [apostasy]; and so it may not happen, that when he hears the words of this curse, that he blesses himself in his heart, saying; “I shall have peace, even though I walk in the imagination [dictates] of my heart”—as though a drunkard could be included with the sober. (Deuteronomy 29:16-19)

Essentially, Joash, Amaziah, and Uzziah all said the same thing. At a certain point, confronted with their sins, they said, “I will not repent, I will not listen to God’s prophets. I will continue in the direction I am going, and despite that, I will live in peace and prosperity.” God says that is the kind of thinking He expects from a drunk: “I can continue to drink and not get become impaired.”

In verse 20, Moses reaches a scary conclusion about how God would deal with such a person at that point:

The LORD would not spare him; for then the anger of the LORD and His jealousy would burn against that man, and every curse that is written in this book would settle on him, and the LORD would blot out his name from under heaven.

Through Moses, God is saying, “Do not kid yourself. You cannot live in violation of My ways and expect Me not to respond.” Most of us have come out of a Protestant society that teaches that God is essentially obligated to give us salvation because of the depth of His grace. Protestant theology proclaims that His mercy is so great that, as long as we have accepted the blood of Jesus Christ, salvation is assured. This claim is not true. While this teaching tickles people’s ears, they forget that God’s justice perfectly balances His mercy, and His love tempers both.

He knows that anybody who desires to live in a way opposed to His way of life would be miserable for all eternity should he inherit the Kingdom of God. God’s sense of justice will not allow Him to give eternal life to such a person. He will not commit a person to that depth of misery, nor will He allow them to cause suffering for others. Like Satan, he would be a thorn in

the side of the godly. If God determines that it would not be good for someone to live in His Kingdom, because he refuses to live as God requires, he will not be there.

Continuing in the Way

When Asa, one of the better kings of Judah, needed some advice during a crisis, God sent a prophet to teach him an important truth:

Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him, “Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.” (II Chronicles 15:1-2)

Other verses in the Bible expand on the principle that underlies what Azariah says here. Jesus uses the same principle when He says that God judges us as we judge others (Matthew 7:1-5), so we need to be careful about the kind of judgment we use in evaluating others whose hearts we cannot read. Jesus also teaches in the Lord’s Prayer that God will forgive us as we forgive (Matthew 6:12).

The underlying principle speaks to reciprocity in spiritual matters. In this case, God tells Asa that faithfulness or loyalty to God is a two-way street. Our actions, good or bad, will receive a corresponding reaction from God. If we are faithful, He will be with us, but we can expect His wrath if we rebel. We cannot count on past good behavior to excuse us in the present.

Notice what Paul tells Christians in the church at Colossae:

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled [He has granted repentance], in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—*if indeed you continue in the faith*, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel [salvation], which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Colossians 1:21-23)

God works the same way today under the New Covenant as He did during the reigns of the three kings we have studied. They all began well, doing “good in the sight of the LORD . . .” But when their godly, human anchors died, or their pride swelled, they began to turn aside. God soon found fault with them and sent them a prophet to turn them to repentance, but they hardened their hearts and rejected God’s offer of mercy. They did not continue in the faith.

Continuing steadily on God’s path tests the reality of our faith. Will we remain loyal to God despite setbacks and trials or even through persecution? We must. As Jesus says in Matthew 24:13, “But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”

¹ Jesus calls him “Zechariah, son of Berechiah,” whereas the chronicler records that he was the son of Jehoiada. Because the place of death matches in both accounts, most commentators believe the two refer to the same man. One of the following two solutions to this problem is likely to be true: 1) Berechiah is Zechariah’s father, but as in so many cases in Scripture, he is said to be the “son” of his very elderly grandfather, Jehoiada; or 2) Jehoiada went by at least two names, one of them being Berechiah.

² Most translators believe “sons” should be singular “son,” as the Septuagint reads. But it is not without precedence that monarchs have taken vengeance on family members of their opponents. Joash’s grandfather and grandmother, Jehoram and Athaliah, both purged their families of potential rivals (II Chronicles 21:4; 22:10). Perhaps their examples inspired Joash to kill some of Jehoiada’s family to somehow avert Zechariah’s plea for divine repayment. If such were the case, plural “sons” would be correct.