

Session 6 The Forerunner Message in Zechariah 3-4

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Zechariah received eight visions in one night (1:7-6:8). The first three visions go together in Zechariah 1-2; in a similar way the fourth and the fifth visions in Zechariah 3-4 go together.
- B. In the first three visions, Jesus promised to manifest His zeal and mercy by personally living in Jerusalem (1:14-16; 2:12). The question arises, *how can a sinful people like Israel participate in such glorious promises?* In Zechariah 3-4, we see that God will cleanse, anoint, and provide for His people so that they can walk in the promises that are described in the first three visions.

¹⁴“I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion...¹⁶I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy;”
(Zech. 1:14)

¹¹“Many nations shall be joined to the LORD...I will dwell in your midst...” (Zech. 2:11)

- C. Outline of Zechariah 3-4

Zechariah 3	The fourth vision: The cleansing of Joshua the high priest
3:1-2	The Lord rebuked Satan for accusing Joshua
3:3-5	Joshua received God’s grace: A symbolic act
3:6-7	Exhorting Joshua to wholeheartedness
3:8-10	The promise of the Messiah and His salvation
Zechariah 4	The fifth vision: The lampstand and two olive trees
4:1-5	The symbolism related to the golden lampstand
4:6-10	The main message of the fifth vision: Two oracles
4:11-14	The explanation of the two olive trees

- D. The dramatic story of rebuilding the house of prayer from 536 to 516 BC, in the days of Zerubbabel, is a strong encouragement to those seeking to build a house of prayer in the end times. The temple, both past and future, is His **“house of prayer”** (Isa. 56:7; Mt. 21:13).
- E. This story is told in three passages (Ezra 1-6; Hag. 1-2; Zech. 1-8); it highlights four leaders who worked together to help the remnant rebuild the temple (the house of prayer; Isa. 56:7; Mt. 21:13). They are the prophets *Zechariah* and *Haggai*, the governor *Zerubbabel*, and the high priest *Joshua*. The events occurred during the reigns of the Persian *King Cyrus* and *King Darius*.
- F. Joshua and Zerubbabel typify the two witnesses in the end times (4:14; Rev. 11:3-4). Joshua was cleansed, and the “accuser of the brethren” was rebuked (3:1-2). This has eschatological significance pointing to the time when Satan the accuser is cast down to the earth (Rev 12:10).

³“And I will give power to my two witnesses...”⁴These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. (Rev. 11:3-4)

¹⁰Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down [to the earth].” (Rev. 12:10)

II. THE FOURTH VISION: THE CLEANSING OF JOSHUA THE HIGH PRIEST (ZECH. 3:1-10)

- A. The Lord addressed the *two main obstacles* that hinder His people from enjoying their destiny. The first obstacle is *our sin*; therefore He provides spiritual cleansing and renewal (Zech. 3). The next obstacle is *our lack of resources*; therefore He gives supernatural provision (Zech. 4). In other words, we need His grace for continued *spiritual renewal* and *supernatural provision*.
- B. In Zechariah 3, He *cleanses their heart* and leads them to wholehearted obedience (3:3-7). In Zechariah 4, He *helps their work* and values it even when it is small and difficult (4:6-10). In other words, He desires wholeheartedness and diligence from His sinful and weak leaders.
- C. The first obstacle to overcome is the lie that we *fail too much* to be used by God (3:1-5). The next obstacle to overcome is the lie that we *lack too much* to complete God’s will (4:6-9).
- D. **Summary:** In this scene (3:1-2), Zechariah saw Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord (the preincarnate Christ). Satan presented a case against Joshua, accusing him of not being qualified for leadership. The problem was that Joshua was in fact guilty of failure (3:4). Joshua was fully cleansed and then called to walk in wholehearted obedience to the Lord (3:7). He and his leadership team were to be a prophetic sign of the Messiah and of His grace (3:8-9). The whole nation of Israel will eventually partake of the Messiah’s extravagant grace (3:10).
- E. Joshua is functioning in his high priestly capacity, as the official representative of Israel. What the Lord did for Joshua, He will do for Israel as a nation and for each believer in Jesus.

III. THE LORD REBUKED SATAN FOR ACCUSING JOSHUA (ZECH. 3:1-2)

- A. Satan accused Joshua to the Lord of not being qualified for his leadership role in Israel (3:1-4). Earlier that night in the first vision, the Angel of the Lord (Jesus) interceded for Israel (1:12). Most conservative commentators believe that the Angel of the Lord is the preincarnate Christ, as the Angel is later called “the Lord” (3:2).

¹Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose [accuse; NASB, NIV] him. ²And the LORD said to Satan... “The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?” (Zech. 3:1-2)

- B. **The Lord who chose Jerusalem:** The Lord rebuked Satan and answered his accusations as the God who chose Jerusalem—the God who chooses to redeem, cleanse, and use sinful people.

- C. **Brand plucked from the fire:** The Lord rebuked Satan and described Joshua (and Israel) as a brand plucked from the fire. The Lord will not tolerate Satan’s accusation against us.
- D. At the same time that Satan was accusing Joshua in the spirit realm, Tattenai, the Persian governor of Samaria, was accusing Joshua in the natural realm (Ezra 5:3; 5:1-17). As the Lord rebuked Satan for accusing Joshua in the spirit, so King Darius rebuked Tattenai for troubling Joshua and commanded him to give financial provision to build the temple (Ezra 6:6-12).

IV. JOSHUA RECEIVED GOD’S GRACE: A SYMBOLIC ACT (ZECH. 3:3-5)

- A. Joshua’s dirty garments were removed, and new ones were given to him (3:3-5). The Lord told the angels to take away his dirty garments, and He told Joshua that He removed his sin (3:4).

³Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. ⁴Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, “Take away the filthy garments from him.” And to him He said, “See, I have removed your iniquity...and I will clothe you with rich robes.” ⁵...I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by. (Zech. 3:3-5)

1. **Filthy garments:** Joshua was guilty, as shown by his filthy clothes. He represents Israel. We, too, are guilty as charged. We have no hope of acquitting ourselves.
2. **Take away the filthy garments:** The Lord commanded the angels to remove Joshua’s dirty clothes. The Lord explained that removing his filthy clothes symbolized removing his sin.
3. **Rich robes:** The rich robes are symbolic of being clothed with God’s righteousness and with priestly robes (Ex. 28:8-9; Lev. 8:7-9; Isa. 61:10; 2 Cor. 5:17, 21).
4. **See:** The Lord exhorted Joshua to “see” that He had removed his sin and clothed him with rich robes (3:4). We must “see” these truths and see how they apply to our lives and Israel.
5. **Intercession:** Zechariah asked the Lord to put a turban on Joshua’s head (3:5).
6. **Turban:** The turban is a symbol of Israel’s reinstatement as a priestly nation (Ex. 19:6).

V. EXHORTING JOSHUA TO WHOLEHEARTEDNESS (ZECH. 3:6-7)

- A. The Lord admonished Joshua to walk in wholehearted obedience—in exhorting him to godly character and diligent service as the conditions for receiving three glorious promises (3:6-7). The word *admonish* means to warn in an earnest way.

⁶Then the Angel of the LORD admonished Joshua, saying, ⁷“...If you will walk in My ways, and if you will keep My command [perform My service], then you shall also judge My house, and have charge of My courts; I will give you places to walk among these who stand here.” (Zech. 3:6-7)

1. **Walk in My ways:** Joshua was to walk with *godly character* in his personal life.

2. **Keep My command:** He was to respond with *diligent service* by being faithful to the assignment the Lord had given him. Keeping the command meant fulfilling the *charge* that God had given him to keep the temple sanctuary and perform the priestly duties related to it.
 3. “Keep My command” is also translated as “keep the charge” (RSV) and “perform My service” (NASB), referring to Joshua’s priestly responsibilities.
 4. The exhortation to keep God’s command, or charge, is “not to quit,” but to be diligent in the ministry assignment that God gave him. Many see their ministry assignment as a voluntary activity that they can quit when it gets hard, rather than a military assignment in a war zone that they must fulfill regardless of the opposition, obstacles, or difficulties that they face.
 5. He was exhorted to *see* (3:4), to *walk* and *keep* (3:7), and to *hear* (3:8).
- B. The Lord promised to bless Joshua in three ways for responding in wholeheartedness (3:7b).

7“Then you shall also judge My house, and likewise have charge of My courts; I will give you places to walk among these who stand here.” (Zech. 3:7b)

1. ***You shall judge My house:*** To judge carries here the meaning of leadership in God’s house or His kingdom purposes in a general way. Faithful service leads to more opportunities to serve.
2. ***You shall have charge of My courts:*** Implies having leadership in the Lord’s courts, or temple (or the house of prayer). Jesus promised to make overcomers “a pillar in His temple” (Rev. 3:12), which speaks of receiving a position of authority in the Millennium.
3. ***Places to walk among these who stand here:*** “These who stand here” refers to the angels who stand in God’s presence (3:4).
 - a. The NASB says, “I will grant you free access among these who are standing here.”
 - b. This promise includes experiencing nearness to God and having access to the angelic realm and to His heavenly council (Jer. 23:18).
 - c. Jesus promised that some of His servants would experience an open heaven (Jn. 1:51).

51...you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” (Jn. 1:51)

VI. THE PROMISE OF THE MESSIAH AND HIS SALVATION (ZECH. 3:8-10)

- A. In Zechariah’s vision, he saw Joshua and his leadership team as a prophetic picture to instruct and inspire others (3:8). They are a prophetic sign of the coming Messiah and of His grace.

8“Hear, O Joshua...you and your companions...for they are a wondrous sign; for behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH. 9For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua...” (Zech. 3:8-9a)

1. ***You and your companions:*** Joshua and his leadership team were priests.

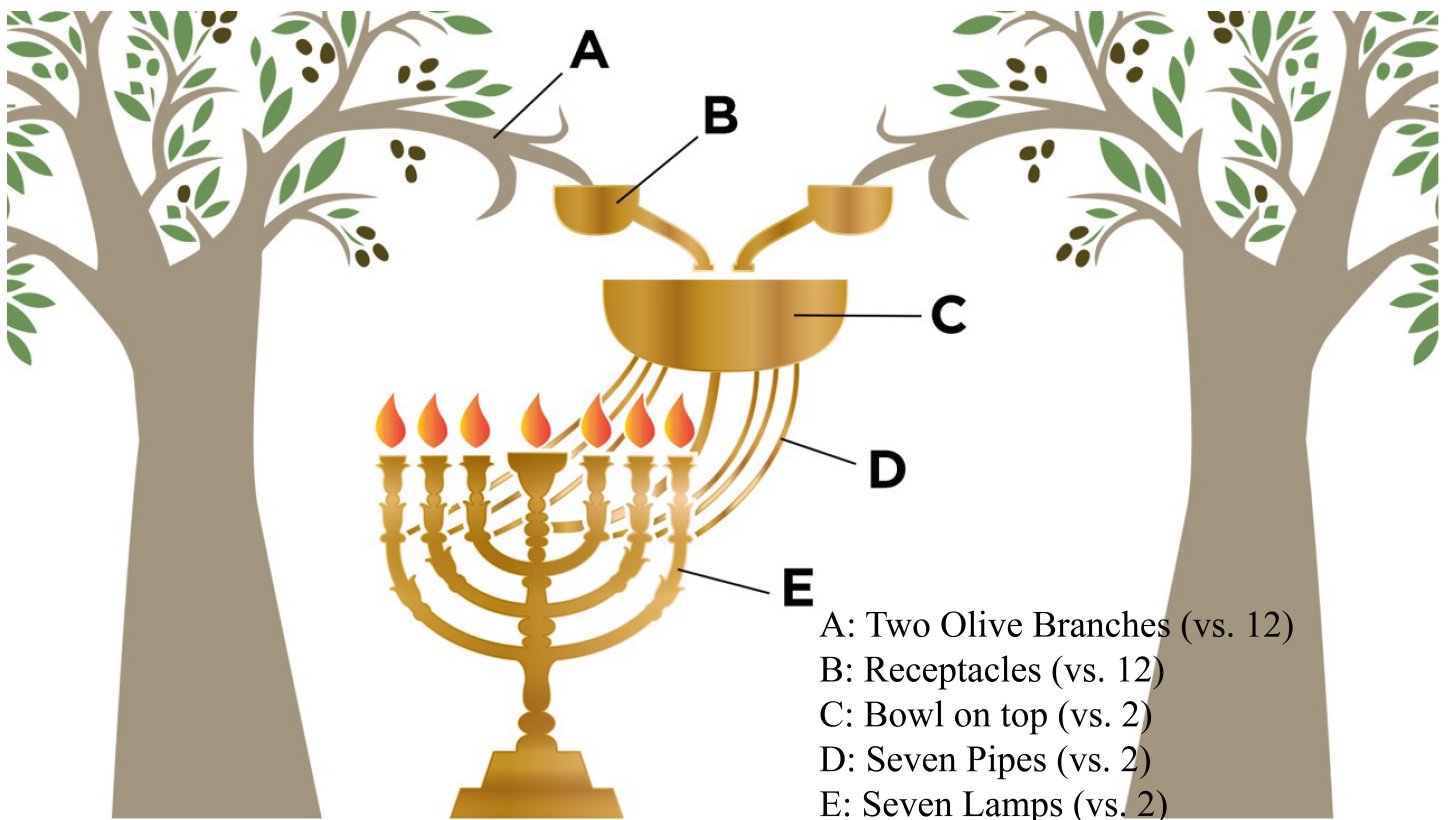
2. **Wondrous sign:** They were to be a wondrous type or picture, pointing to the Messiah as the “Branch” and the “stone” and to how to function in priestly ministry.
 - a. In living faithfully, they became a picture which gave others *insight* into the Messiah and *inspiration* to walk in His grace.
 - b. They were “proof” that the priestly lifestyle is wonderful, attainable, and doable.
 3. **Hear:** They were to be careful to “hear” so that, as a prophetic picture or model, they would give insight into what God is like and inspire others to imitate their faith.
- B. Joshua was shown a Branch and a stone—both speak of the Messiah (3:8b-9). A stone is something that bears weight, and a branch grows and spreads out as its life passes throughout other branches. Paul combined building and plant metaphors (1 Cor. 3:9; Eph. 2:19-22; 3:17).
- ⁸“For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH. ⁹For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua: upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription,” says the LORD of hosts, “and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.” (Zech. 3:8-9)***
1. **Branch:** The picture of the Messiah as the Branch of the Lord expresses various facets of Jesus’ glory (Isa. 4:2; 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). Jesus’ ministry or work grows and branches out; His people are joined to Him as smaller branches (Jn. 15:4-5).
 2. **Stone:** Zechariah was to behold, or understand, the stone that was laid before Joshua (3:9). Jesus is the foundation stone of Israel’s salvation and the stone over which she stumbled (Mt. 21:42). Jesus is the rock on which the Church is built (Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pet. 2:9). The stone, or rock, is a figure of God and the Messiah (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18; 2 Sam. 22:2; Ps. 18:2; 31:3; 62:7; 89:26; 94:22; 95:1; 118:22; Isa. 8:13-15; 17:10; 28:16; Dan. 2:35, 45; Zech. 3:9; 10:4; Mt. 16:18; 21:42; Rom. 9:33; 1 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6-8).
 3. **Seven eyes:** On the stone were seven eyes symbolizing Jesus’ omniscience (Rev. 5:6).
 - a. Jesus possesses omniscience—all knowledge and wisdom.
 - b. In 4:10, we learn that the seven eyes on this stone are God’s eyes going to and fro throughout the earth.
 4. **I will engrave its inscription:** Since Israel’s national salvation is mentioned in the next phrase, the inscription is probably related to her salvation.
 - a. God will engrave on the stone a declaration related to His removing Israel’s sin in one day (3:9c). It is not clear what the inscription specifically is.

- b. Stones in the ancient world had writings on them; they were memorials to commemorate significant events or to tell of the greatness of a king, etc.
- 5. ***I will remove the iniquity***: In one day, the sin of the land of Israel will be removed (3:9).
 - a. In one day, Jesus accomplished the redemption of Israel on the cross. And, the day of His return will be the day of Israel’s national salvation (3:9; 12:10-13:2; Rom. 11:26).
 - b. The way Joshua and his team received God’s grace in one day was both a sign and the assurance that in one day Israel would be saved and qualified for her priestly role.
- C. ***Fig tree and vine***: Israel will function as a community that enjoys prosperity and security (3:10).
 - 1. To sit under “his” vine and fig tree indicates that each one will be prosperous.
 - 2. This scene pictures the gladness of each Israelite as they invite friends to partake of hospitality under their vine and fig tree in the Millennium.
 - 3. Zechariah develops this idea later in the book (8:4-5).

VII. THE FIFTH VISION: THE LAMPSTAND AND TWO OLIVE TREES (ZECH. 4:1-14)

- A. ***Summary***: The lampstand in the holy place of the temple was the main feature in the vision. Zechariah saw a seven-branched lampstand (menorah) with a bowl on its top (4:2) to receive the oil that came from two olive trees. At the end of each of the seven branches of the lampstand was a burning lamp fueled by a pipe connecting to the bowl (4:2). Two olive trees stood next to the lampstand (4:3). Two olive branches dripped oil into receptacles (extensions) of the two golden pipes (4:12) that enabled the oil to flow to the bowl on top of the lampstand. The two olive branches are symbolic of two anointed leaders whom God used to keep the lamps aflame (4:14).

²“There is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. ³Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left.”...¹²“What are these two olive branches that drip into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains [flows from the branches]?”...¹⁴“These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.” (Zech. 4:2-3, 12, 14)



VIII. THE SYMBOLISM RELATED TO THE GOLDEN LAMPSTAND (ZECH. 4:1-5)

- A. Zechariah saw a lampstand (menorah) with a bowl on top of it, next to two olive trees (4:3). The message of this vision was to give Zerubbabel assurance that he would successfully mobilize the people and overcome all the obstacles to complete the temple with the Spirit's help.

¹The angel...came back and wakened me...²And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I said, "I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. ³Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left." ⁴So I answered...the angel...saying, "What are these, my lord?" ⁵...the angel...said, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." (Zech. 4:1-5)

1. **Lampstand:** The Hebrew word for lampstand is *menorah*. The lampstand symbolizes God's people being witnesses of the light of God's presence and truth.
2. **Two olive trees:** The two olive trees stood to the right and left of the lampstand (4:3).

IX. THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE FIFTH VISION: TWO ORACLES (ZECH. 4:6-10)

- A. The angel answered Zechariah’s question “What are these?” (4:4) with two oracles (4:6-7, 8-10). The angel explained how the olive trees were related to building the temple. The two oracles have a similar message—to give assurance that they would complete the temple with the Spirit’s help.
- B. **The first oracle:** The message of the first oracle was that God’s power would prevail over all the obstacles in rebuilding, sustaining, and maintaining the temple (4:6-7).

“This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts. ⁷Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain and he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of “Grace, grace to it!”” (Zech. 4:6-7)

1. **Not by might or power:** The terms *might* and *power* speak of human ability and resources. He was not to hope in the political or economic might of Persia as his primary resource.
 2. **Mountain:** This speaks of the many obstacles that stood in Zerubbabel’s way.
 - a. There were four main obstacles—the *Samaritans’* political and civil opposition (Ezra 4:1-8; 5:6-17); *Israel’s spiritual compromise*, lethargy, fear, and strife (1:2-4; 8:10; Hag. 1:2-4, 9); an *economic crisis* that was intensified by drought and agricultural failures (Hag. 1:1-11); the *desolation of Jerusalem*—the city lacked infrastructure, etc.
 - b. Daniel prophesied that Jerusalem would be restored in troublesome times (Dan. 9:25)
 3. **Shall become a plain:** The heap of rubble from the destruction of Solomon’s temple 70 years earlier would be completely removed as Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple.
 4. **Shall bring forth the capstone:** The capstone was ceremonially put in place when the temple project was finished. Zechariah received this word on February 15, 519 BC (1:7), and he completed the temple about three years later in March 516 BC (Ezra 6:15).
 5. **Shouts of grace:** Zerubbabel was to pray (speak) grace over the temple project each day.
- C. **The second oracle:** The message of the second oracle was similar to the first one giving assurance of finishing the temple (4:8-10). This oracle highlighted Zerubbabel’s role and success.

“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands shall also finish it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.” (Zech. 4:9)

1. **You laid the foundation:** Zerubbabel laid the foundation of the temple in their second year after returning from Babylon, 536 BC (Ezra 3:10). The resumption of work was in 520 BC, after a sixteen-year delay (8:9-10; Hag. 2:18).
2. **His hands shall finish it:** The angelic interpreter promised Zerubbabel that he would finish the temple (4:8). He finished it three years later (Ezra 6:14-15).

D. The Lord rejoiced in Zerubbabel's work and diligence in the day of small things (4:10).

¹⁰*“For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth.” (Zech. 4:10)*

1. **Plumb line:** A plumb line is used especially during the early stages of a construction project.
2. **In the hand:** When Zerubbabel took hold of the plumb line, he took the responsibility and ownership of building the temple. In this hour, God is giving grace to those with the spirit of Zerubbabel, those who take ownership and accept responsibility to build the house of prayer.
3. **God's eyes:** “These seven” refers to God's eyes, signifying His omniscience. His eyes see our enemies, needs, obstacles, efforts, tears, love, and the value of our work.
4. **Rejoice:** The eyes of the Lord watch each step of our progress in the work with rejoicing.
5. **Do not despise the day of small things:** The Lord values our work even when it is small, and He desires diligence from His leaders in hard and small ministry assignments. Many despised the smallness of the work on the temple, seeing it as insignificant (Ezra 3:12; Hag. 2:3).

X. THE EXPLANATION OF THE TWO OLIVE TREES (ZECH. 4:11-14)

A. The interpreting angel explained the meaning of the two olive trees (4:11-14). The angel had been answering the question about what the two olive trees represented (4:5-10). The angel was saying, “They are two men building the temple who receive supernatural help—Joshua and Zerubbabel.”

¹¹*I...said to him, “What are these two olive trees...?” ¹²*And I further answered and said to him, “What are these two olive branches that drip into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains?” ¹³Then he answered...“Do you not know...?” And I said, “No...” ¹⁴He said, “These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.” (Zech. 4:11-14)**

B. **Two anointed ones:** The two branches represent two anointed ones (4:14). Five hundred years later, John received insight into these “olive tree ministries” (Rev. 11:4). They will be end-time forerunners anointed to prophesy and do miracles and “provide oil”—inspiration for many.

³*I will give power to My two witnesses...⁴*These are the two olive trees...standing before the God of the earth... (Rev. 11:3-4)**