

1 Kings 8:27

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?

Analysis

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? Solomon's rhetorical question during the temple dedication expresses profound theological insight about God's transcendence. The Hebrew construction ha'umnam (הִאָמֵן, 'indeed' or 'truly') introduces genuine wonder: can the infinite God truly inhabit finite space? The phrase 'heaven and heaven of heavens' (hashamayim ushmei hashamayim, הַשָּׁמַיִם וְשָׁמַיִם הַשָּׁמָיִם וְשָׁמָיִם) emphasizes God's incomprehensible greatness—even the highest celestial realms cannot contain Him.

The verb kul ('כּוֹל, 'contain') suggests both spatial capacity and ability to hold or comprehend. God transcends all created limitations of space, time, and understanding. Solomon's comparative phrase 'how much less this house' (af ki habayit hazeh, אִפְּךְ בַּיּוֹת הַזֶּה uses the Hebrew qal vachomer argument (light and heavy): if the highest heavens cannot contain God, certainly an earthly temple built of stone and cedar cannot.

This theological sophistication prevents idolatrous confusion between the temple and God Himself. While the temple represents God's presence and becomes the place where His Name dwells (v. 29), it doesn't confine or limit God. This tension between divine transcendence and immanence—God's absolute otherness yet

personal nearness—lies at the heart of biblical theology. The temple mediates God's presence without domesticating His infinite majesty.

Historical Context

Solomon's temple dedication occurred around 960 BCE, representing the culmination of seven years of construction (6:38). The temple's completion fulfilled David's desire to build God a house (2 Samuel 7:2), though God had declared He would establish David's house (dynasty) instead. The temple's construction using materials from Lebanon, skilled Phoenician craftsmen, and conscripted Israelite labor created the ancient world's most magnificent sanctuary dedicated to Yahweh.

Ancient Near Eastern temples typically represented houses for deity-images where gods literally dwelt and received food offerings. The theology underlying pagan temples saw them as divine residences essential for the gods' presence in the human realm. Solomon's prayer carefully distinguishes Israelite faith from such conceptions—Yahweh cannot be housed or fed, but graciously chooses to place His Name in the temple as a meeting place with His people.

The concept of 'heaven and heaven of heavens' reflects ancient cosmological understanding of multiple celestial spheres, though the theological point emphasizes God's transcendence over all creation rather than mapping specific astronomical regions. This language appears elsewhere in Scripture (Deuteronomy 10:14, Nehemiah 9:6, Psalm 148:4) to express God's supreme sovereignty over all realms of existence.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does the paradox of God's transcendence (beyond all creation) and immanence (present with His people) deepen your understanding of who God is?
2. In what ways might Christians today fall into either ancient paganism (domesticating God) or modern naturalism (dismissing God's presence)?
3. How should understanding our bodies and the church as God's temple shape daily life, relationships, and priorities?

Interlinear Text

הַשְׁמָם יִמְשָׁל בְּאָמֵן מִכְּבָד
H3588 indeed H552 dwell H3427 But will God H430 on the earth H5921 H2009 and heaven H8064 H776

הַשְׁמָם יִמְשָׁל אֶת־אָמֵן מִכְּבָד
H8064 and heaven H8064 H3808 cannot contain H3557 thee how much less H637 H3588

בְּבָנִיתִי אֲשֶׁר בָּזְבָּד הַבָּבָת
this house H2088 H834 that I have builded H1129

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 66:1 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?

2 Chronicles 2:6 (Parallel theme): But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? who am I then, that I should build him an house, save only to burn sacrifice before him?

Jeremiah 23:24 (Parallel theme): Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.

2 Chronicles 6:18 (References God): But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!

Deuteronomy 10:14 (References God): Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD'S thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is.

Psalms 113:4 (Parallel theme): The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.

John 1:14 (Parallel theme): And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Acts 17:24 (References God): God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

1 John 3:1 (References God): Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.