

I. Session 80: The Immensity of God

- a. Purpose: In this session we shall look at what the Bible has to say about the immensity of God so that we would draw implications for our lives.
- b. Definitions of the immensity of God:
 - i. Wayne Grudem: “God cannot be contained by any space, no matter how large.”¹
 - ii. John Feinberg: “...God cannot be limited to just one spatial location, for he transcends them all and is at all places at once.”²
 - iii. John Frame: “Spatial omnipresence cannot mean that God is a physical substance spread through the material universe. What it means, rather is that God’s power, knowledge and ability to act in the finite world are universal.”³
- c. What does the Bible have to say about the immensity of God?
 - i. “*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!*” (1 Kings 8:27)
 1. What’s going on in the context?
 - a. King Solomon has just completed building the temple of God.
 - b. Solomon in the beginning of **chapter 8** has brought the ark to the temple and the glory of the Lord has descended with it (**v.1-11**)
 - c. Solomon then addressed the crowd (**v.12-21**)
 - d. This is followed by a long recording of Solomon’s prayer (**v.13-53**)
 - e. It is in Solomon’s prayer that this verse teaches us the immensity of God.
 2. Notice this verse mentioned opens with a rhetorical question: “*But will God indeed dwell on the earth?*”
 - a. If you remember your Scripture, it was Solomon’s father David who first thought of the idea of building a temple for God.
 - b. There’s an understanding that a temple is where God “lives at” in some sense as we see from God’s response to David in **2 Samuel 7:5-7**: “*Go and say to My servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? 6 For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a [a]tabernacle. 7 Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?’”*”

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 174.

² John Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 253.

³ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2002), 580.

- c. God's response in **2 Samuel 7:5-7** does suggest that God does not need a "house" to contain Him.
 - d. Like God's rhetorical question in **2 Samuel 7:5-7** Solomon also asks with a rhetorical question that imply God doesn't need a dwelling on earth. Solomon might have asked this because he was aware of what God told David.
 - 3. God's immensity is proven by a positive affirmation of God's immensity: "*Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You*"
 - a. We typically think of heaven being where God resides and there is truth to that (see verses where God is described being in heaven in passages like **Psalm 2:4, Psalm 115:3**).
 - b. However here we see that Solomon say that "*heaven*" and "*the highest heaven*" cannot exhaustively contain God.
 - 4. God's immensity is proven by a negative denial of the limitation of God: "*how much less this house which I have built!*"
 - a. Here Solomon acknowledges that if God cannot be exhaustively contained in the space of "*heaven*" and "*the highest heaven*" then the temple is less so something that can contain God.
 - 5. Thus this verse affirm the doctrine of the immensity of God.
- ii. "*But who is able to build a house for Him, for the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain Him? So who am I, that I should build a house for Him, except to burn incense before Him?*" (**2 Chronicles 2:6**)
 - 1. Both John Feinberg⁴ and John Frame⁵ seem to think **2 Chronicles 2:6** is the exact parallel **1 Kings 8:27** but the wordings and situation is different.
 - 2. What's going on in the context?
 - a. Here King Solomon in **2 Chronicles 2** wants to build the temple (v.1) which takes place chronologically before **1 Kings 8** where Solomon has just completed building the temple of God.
 - b. As part of the preparation for building the temple Solomon sent a message to the king of neighboring Tyre for building material (v.2)
 - c. It is in Solomon's message to the king of Tyre that we see the confession of God's immensity.
 - 3. This verse contains two rhetorical questions both of which affirm the immensity of God.
 - 4. "*But who is able to build a house for Him, for the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain Him?*" (**2 Chronicles 2:6a**)

⁴ John Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 253. Feinberg after citing 1 Kings 8:27 writes "see parallel in 2 Chron 2:6."

⁵ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2002), 580. Frame after quoting 1 Kings 8:27 writes "cf. 2 Chron 2:6."

Even with Solomon's building project he acknowledges that
"the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain Him."

5. *"So who am I, that I should build a house for Him, except to burn incense before Him"* (2 Chronicles 2:6b)
 - a. The second question gets personal for Solomon now mentions himself: *"So who am I..."*
 - b. Knowing God's immensity the reason for building the temple is now for this reason: *"to burn incense before Him"*
 - c. Notice it is not to "house" God in His entirety.
- iii. *"Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? 2 For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being," declares the Lord. "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word."* (Isaiah 66:1-2)
 1. Context is this is the Prophet Isaiah writing what God has to say in the last chapter of the book of Isaiah.
 2. Here two rhetorical questions are asked: *"Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest?"*
 - a. The first one shows that we cannot build a house that can house God in His entirety.
 - b. The second question is also concerning place but one where God can rest with the assumption that there is none.
 3. In trying to build a house for God, God also points out that He created the very materials that is required in building a house for Him: *"For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being"* In other words all things depend upon Him rather than He need those things to house Him.
 4. Thus if God dwells anywhere it is because of God's condensation rather than because He needs to be dwell somewhere.
 5. The prerequisite for God to indwell anywhere according to God is a spirit of humility and fear of God: *"But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word"* (v.2)
- iv. *"However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says:"* (Acts 7:48)
 1. In the context this is Stephen preaching to the religious leaders and recounting Israel's redemptive history.
 2. In verses 46-47 Stephen mentions about the history of the building of the temple started by David and completed by Solomon. Thus Stephen is expounding the truth on God's immensity as taught in the verses we have seen earlier.
 3. From the Old Testament Stephen says that God *"does not dwell in houses made by human hands."* He is affirming that God transcends any house or man-made temple.

4. Even how Paul calls God as “*the Most High*” is a contrasts to “*houses made by human hands*” made on Earth.
5. To reinforce the point that Paul here is talking about the immensity of God Paul mentions “*as the prophet says...*” Who does Paul quote? He quotes Isaiah and specifically **Isaiah 66:1-2** in **verses 49-50**.
6. Thus we see Stephen expounding on all the verses on God’s immensity.
7. Following this discussion Stephen then attacks the religious leaders sins. There is a definite contrasts between the immensity of God and sinners.

d. Implications

- i. We must never forget that the study of God’s attribute is done for the purpose of worship; Are you at awe at the immensity of God?
- ii. Knowing the immensity of God should humble us; recall Solomon’s words in His prayer in which it flows with humility knowing that God doesn’t need the temple that was built. Does the doctrine of the immensity of God motivate you to true humility?
- iii. Does it move you to humility knowing that our works for God is quite small in comparison to God, even of that of building a temple for God?