

Ezekiel 37:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest.

Analysis

The divine question **"Son of man, can these bones live?"** (ben-adam hatichyenah ha'atzamot ha'eleh, בֶּן־אָדָם הַתִּחְיֵינָה הָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה) tests Ezekiel's faith and prepares him for God's revelation. The address "son of man" (ben-adam, בֶּן־אָדָם) appears 93 times in Ezekiel, emphasizing the prophet's humanity and mortality in contrast to God's divine power. By constantly reminding Ezekiel he is merely human, God keeps him humble while entrusting him with extraordinary revelation.

The question "can these bones live?" isn't seeking information—God knows the answer. Rather, it challenges Ezekiel (and readers) to consider whether restoration is possible for what appears utterly dead. The Hebrew verb *chayah* (חָיָה, "live") means to live, revive, or be restored to life. From a human perspective, dried bones cannot live—they're beyond resuscitation, past decay into permanent death. Yet the question implies that divine power transcends human impossibility. The interrogative format forces reflection: Is anything too hard for the LORD (Genesis 18:14; Jeremiah 32:27)?

Ezekiel's response—**"O Lord GOD, thou knowest"** (Adonai Yahweh atah yadata, אָדֹנָי יְהוָה אַתָּה יָדָעָה)—demonstrates wise humility. He neither presumes that bones cannot live (limiting God's power) nor presumes they can (claiming prophetic certainty without divine revelation). Instead, he defers to God's knowledge and power. The double divine name "Lord GOD" (Adonai Yahweh) emphasizes both God's sovereign authority (Adonai) and covenant faithfulness (Yahweh). Ezekiel's

answer models appropriate response to God's mysteries—humble acknowledgment that God alone knows and can accomplish what seems impossible to us. This points to Christ, who demonstrated ultimate power over death through His resurrection (John 11:25-26) and who will raise all believers (John 5:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Historical Context

This question-and-answer dialogue between God and Ezekiel reflects the pedagogical method common in prophetic literature—God teaches through questions that provoke thought and faith. Similar patterns appear throughout Scripture: God asking Adam "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9), asking Cain "Where is Abel?" (Genesis 4:9), asking Job to explain creation (Job 38-41). These questions don't seek information but prompt self-examination and revelation of truth.

The historical context of exile made the question particularly pointed. Could Israel, scattered among nations, temple destroyed, monarchy ended, national identity threatened, possibly be restored? Human wisdom said no—ancient empires that fell rarely rose again. Egypt, Assyria, and eventually Babylon itself would never recover former glory. Why should Israel be different? Yet God's question implied that His covenant people were different—not because of inherent superiority but because of divine election and promise. God's faithfulness to His covenant transcends historical patterns.

Ezekiel's humble answer contrasts with presumptuous claims elsewhere. Job's friends presumed to know why Job suffered and what God was doing (Job 4-25), but were rebuked for speaking without knowledge (Job 42:7). In the New Testament, disciples presumed to know who could be saved ("Who then can be saved?" Mark 10:26), but Jesus corrected them: "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27). Ezekiel's response models the proper balance—trusting God's power while humbly acknowledging we don't always know what He will do. This prepares him (and us) to receive revelation without pride or presumption.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Ezekiel's humble response ("thou knowest") model the proper balance between faith in God's power and humility about our limited understanding?
2. What apparently impossible situations in your life require you to trust that God knows and can accomplish what you cannot foresee?
3. In what ways might we presume to limit God by deciding what He can or cannot do based on human reasoning?
4. How does this dialogue between God and Ezekiel inform our prayer life when facing requests that seem humanly impossible?
5. What does the title "son of man" applied to both Ezekiel and Jesus teach about prophetic ministry, human limitation, and divine power?

Interlinear Text

וָאֲנִי רַ	אֵלַי י	בֶּן	אֶדָם	הַתְּחִי יָנָה	הָעֵצָם וְתֵ
And I answered	H413	unto me Son	of man	live	can these bones
H559		H1121	H120	H2421	H6106
הֲאֵל לִי	וָאֲנִי רַ	אֶדָנִי י	יְהוָה ה	אֵת ה	יָדְעָתָּ:
H428	And I answered	O Lord	GOD	H859	thou knowest
	H559	H136	H3069		H3045

Additional Cross-References

John 5:21 (Parallel theme): For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.

Deuteronomy 32:39 (References God): See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.

Romans 4:17 (References God): (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

Hebrews 11:19 (References God): Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

Acts 26:8 (References God): Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

1 Samuel 2:6 (References Lord): The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.