

Ecclesiastes 12:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

Analysis

Or ever the silver cord be loosed—the allegory shifts from bodily house to fragile objects representing life. The 'silver cord' (שְׁבָדֶל קְבָדֶל) is a precious, delicate thread holding something valuable. Its loosing (breaking) represents death's severance of life. **Or the golden bowl be broken**—another precious vessel destroyed. **Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain**—the water pitcher shatters while drawing from the life-giving spring. **Or the wheel broken at the cistern**—the rope-wheel mechanism for raising water fails. All four images depict sudden, irreversible cessation: the cord snaps, bowl shatters, pitcher breaks, wheel fails. Life's fragile infrastructure collapses.

These metaphors emphasize life's preciousness (silver, gold) and fragility (cord, bowl, pitcher, wheel—all breakable). The fountain and cistern images evoke life-sustaining water, now inaccessible when the means of drawing it fail. Verse 7 will make explicit what these metaphors suggest: death's arrival when spirit returns to God. The imagery creates urgency: remember God before these break (v. 1). The New Testament affirms life's fragility (James 4:14—"a vapour") while promising believers that physical death means being 'present with the Lord' (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Historical Context

Ancient Israel's arid climate made water infrastructure vital—cisterns, wells, fountains sustained life. A broken pitcher or failed wheel meant inability to access life-giving water—a vivid metaphor for death. Silver and gold were precious metals reserved for valuable items—their use here emphasizes life's preciousness despite fragility. The accumulated imagery (four different breaking/failing mechanisms) creates poetic intensity. Jewish interpretation often connected the 'silver cord' to the spinal cord or life-thread, and the 'golden bowl' to the skull or body cavity housing vital organs. Church fathers saw these verses as describing death's moment when body and soul separate—the precious but temporary union ending.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does meditating on life's fragility (breakable cords, bowls, pitchers) affect your daily priorities and eternal investments?
2. What 'silver and gold' aspects of life are you treating as permanent that are actually temporary and breakable?

Interlinear Text

גַּל תִּנְרֶזׁ בְּכֶסֶף כְּבָל יְכַחַק לֹא אָשָׁר עַד

H5704

H834

Or ever

H3808

יְכַחַק

H7368

כְּבָל

H2256

כְּסֶף

H3701

זָהָב

H7533

תִּנְרֶזׁ

H1543

בְּכֶסֶף בְּכֶסֶף וְעַל כְּדָבָר וְעַל כְּדָבָר

or the golden

be broken

or the pitcher

H2091

H7665

H3537

בְּכֶסֶף וְעַל כְּדָבָר

at the fountain

be broken

H4002

H7533

לְכַדְמָה אֶל הַגְּלָגָל

or the wheel

H413

at the cistern

H1534

H953

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