

# 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

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**Or ever the silver cord be loosed**—the allegory shifts from bodily house to fragile objects representing life. The 'silver cord' (חֵבֶל הַכֶּסֶד) 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

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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

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**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

## Study Questions

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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?

עַד	אַשׁוּר	לֹא	יִכְחֹק	חֶבֶל	הַכֶּסֶף	וְנָרַץ	גֵּל תִּ
H5704	H834	Or ever	H7368	cord	the silver	be broken	bow
		H3808		H2256	H3701	H7533	H1543