A social-scientific study of the Parable of the Shrewd Steward in Luke 16:1-9

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Theology (New Testament) at Stellenbosch University

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March 2016

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

The understanding of the parable of the shrewd steward in Luke 16:1-9 has been problematic throughout its interpretive history. The main challenge is Jesus' praise and commendation of the dishonest acts of the steward therein. In Nigeria, if not in most African societies, where there is a need for faithful stewards, one is left confused about how to understand that a master would praise the dishonest act of his steward in a context in which corruption has become a way of life. This study was undertaken on the assumption that, of the different genres used by Jesus during his earthly ministry, the most familiar and striking are the parables, which comprise one third of Jesus' teaching. The importance of the parables in terms of understanding Jesus' history, ethics and self-understanding cannot be overemphasised. The parables challenge their readers because, despite their superficial simplicity, they convey key insights into the nature of the Kingdom of God. In this study, the parables are understood in line with the meaning of the Hebrew *Mashal* and the Greek *parabole*, as referring to a proverb, a riddle or a metaphor used to convince and persuade hearers. In this study, the literary context of the parable of the shrewd steward was examined, as well as its demarcation. The study suggests that, even if the parable told by the historical Jesus may have ended in v. 8a, Luke has added a number of sayings that reveal his understanding of the parable as being about the correct use of wealth and possessions in the light of the coming Kingdom of God. An annotated translation of Luke 16:1-9 is also provided.

Using a social scientific method in order to understand the text in terms of its social context, the parable was read verse by verse and the function of stewards in the first century was clarified. It is argued that a steward was an estate manager and thus someone in the position of a considerable amount of authority and trust. The steward in the parable under consideration was the responsible agent to whom the absentee master had entrusted a great deal. It thus is clear that a steward like the one in Luke 16 was highly placed in the household bureaucracy of the rich and powerful elite. The theological perspective of the text in question was also brought to light. The words of Jesus in v. 9, on the use of worldly possessions to make friends, necessitated considering Luke's concept of wealth and possessions in the light of the coming Kingdom of God. It was argued that, in this parable, Luke intended to criticise the wrong use of wealth and possessions. The social system suggested in the text, which includes honour and shame, the patron-client relationships, benefaction, hospitality and the economic situation in

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the first century, was also investigated as explaining key values in the first-century Greco-Roman world.

The application of the text in question to the contemporary Nigeria, and southern Kaduna in particular, was furthermore surveyed. The survey revealed that African scholars, like scholars on other continents, are also struggling with the interpretative problems posed by the parable under consideration. The African scholars also agreed with their counterparts on other continents that the focus of the parable is not on the dishonest acts of the steward, but on his shrewdness. The parable stresses that believers should be faithful stewards by responding appropriately to the coming kingdom of God by using their possessions to care for the poor.

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Opsomming

Ons begrip van die gelykenis van die oneerlike bestuurder in Lukas 16:1-9 is reeds dwarsdeur die verklarende geskiedenis daarvan problematies. Die vernaamste uitdaging is Jesus se lof en aanbeveling van die oneerlike dade van die bestuurder daarin. In Nigerië, net soos in die meeste samelewings in Afrika, waar daar ’n behoefte aan betroubare bestuurders is, word ons verward gelaat oor hoe om te verstaan dat ’n meester die oneerlike daad van sy bestuurder sal loof in ’n konteks waarbinne korrupsie ’n bestaanswyse geword het. Hierdie studie is onderneem op die aanname dat, onder die verskillende genres wat deur Jesus tydens sy bediening op aarde gebruik is, die bekendstes en treffendste die gelykenisse is, wat een derde van Jesus se leer uitmaak. Die belangrikheid van gelykenisse in terme van ’n begrip van Jesus se geskiedenis, etiek en selfbegrip kan nie oorbeklemtoon word nie. Die gelykenisse daag hulle lesers uit omdat hulle, ten spyte van hulle oppervlakkige eenvoudigheid, sleutel-insigte in die aard van die Koninkryk van God verskaf. In hierdie studie is die gelykenisse verstaan in lyn met die betekenis van die Hebreeuse *Mashal* en die Griekse *parabole*, as verwysing na ’n spreuk, ’n raaisel of ’n metafoor wat gebruik word om hoorders te oortuig. In hierdie studie is die literêre konteks van die gelykenis van die oneerlike bestuurder ondersoek, sowel as die afbakening daarvan. Die studie stel voor dat, selfs al het die gelykenis soos deur die historiese Jesus vertel in v. 8a geëindig, Lukas ’n aantal spreuke bygevoeg het wat sy begrip van die gelykenis – as ’n vertelling oor die korrekte gebruik van rykdom en besittings in die lig van die komende Koninkryk van God – vertoon. ’n Geannoteerde vertaling van Lukas 16:1-9 word ook verskaf.

’n Sosiaalwetenskaplike metode is gebruik om die teks te begryp in terme van sy sosiale inhoud, die gelykenis is vers vir vers gelees en die funksie van bestuurders in die eerste eeu is uitgeklaar. Daar is voorgehou dat ’n bestuurder ’n landgoedbestuurder is en dus iemand in ’n posisie wat noemenswaardige gesag en vertroue vereis. Die bestuurder in die gelykenis wat hier oorweeg word, was die agent wat deur die afwesige meester met heelwat vertrou is. Dit is dus duidelik dat ’n bestuurder soos die een in Lukas 16 hooggeplaas was in die huishoudelike burokrasie van die ryk en magtige elite. Die teologiese perspektief van die betrokke teks is ook aan die lig gebring. Die woorde van Jesus in v. 9, oor die gebruik van aardse besittings om vriende te maak, het dit nodig gemaak om Lukas se konsep van rykdom en besittings in die lig van die komende Koninkryk van God te oorweeg. Daar word voorgehou dat Lukas in hierdie gelykenis van plan was om die verkeerde gebruik van rykdom en besittings te kritiseer. Die maatskaplike

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stelsel wat in die teks voorgestel word, wat eer en skande, beskermheer-kliënt verhoudings, weldade, gasvryheid en die ekonomiese toestand in die eerste eeu insluit, is ook ondersoek as verklaring van sleutelwaardes in die eerste-eeuse Grieks-Romeinse wêreld.

Die toepassing van die spesifieke teks in die moderne Nigerië, en in suidelike Kaduna in die besonder, is ook ondersoek. Hierdie opname het getoon dat Afrika-geleerdes, soos geleerdes op ander vastelande, ook sukkel met die verklarende probleme wat deur die betrokke gelykenis opgelewer word. Die Afrika-geleerdes was dit ook eens met hulle eweknieë op ander vastelande dat die fokus van hierdie gelykenis nie die oneerlike dade van die bestuurder was nie, maar sy uitgeslapenheid. Die gelykenis benadruk dat gelowiges getroue bestuurders moet wees deur gepas te reageer op die komende Koninkryk van God deur hulle besittings te gebruik om na die armes om te sien.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to God Almighty, for his provisions and for enabling me to complete this research. I also dedicate it to my beloved, caring and unerstanding wife, Helen D. Silas, and to my lovely children, Marvellous (Yyakazah) and Wisdom (Kazahmi) D. Silas, for their love, concern, sacrifice, prayers and moral support. The research is also dedicated to Mr and Mrs Ishaku Shekari and to Mr and Mrs Yakubu Kantiok, and to all the members of The First African Church Mission Zonkwa, for their role in making my studies a success.

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List of abbreviations

Ac.	Acts
Cor.	Corinthians
Deut.	Deuteronomy
B.C.	Before Christ
Gal.	Galatians
Gen.	Genesis
Is.	Isaiah
Jam.	James
Jdg.	Judges
Jn.	John
Kg.	Kings
Lk.	Luke
Mk.	Mark
Mt.	Mathew
n.d.	No date
Neh.	Nehemiah
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Phil.	Philippians
Pt.	Peter
Rom.	Romans
Sam.	Samuel
Thess.	Thessalonians
v.	Verse
vs	Verses

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Acknowledgements

I would not have accomplished this study without the help of particular individuals to whom I remain grateful. Above all, I give God the glory for his faithfulness in protecting me throughout the tasks of this study. Even when I thought I would not be able study at Stellenbosch as a result of financial problems, God made it possible. I am grateful.

My appreciation goes to my academic supervisor, Dr Marius Nel for his patience, love, encouragement and understanding. His willingness to help me grow academically is hugely acknowledged.

I would also like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor Hendrik L. Bosman, the Dean of the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University, Dr Hansen, the past and present Faculty Manager, and the International Office and the University for their financial Support during my studies. My special thanks also goes to the entire staff of the Faculty of Theology, especially the Old and New Testament department. Again, thanks to all my 2015/2016 theology course mates.

Exceptional thanks go to my spiritual fathers: Bishop Z. Yusuf, Bishop Danlami Bello, Bishop I. N. Nyan and Rev. Yunana Gaiya, all members of the First African Church Mission Kafanchan Diocese, for standing by me. Especially the Church in Zonkwa – what you did to me words of mouth cannot explain, but the good Lord, whom you did it for, will surely bless you and do to you more than what you did to me. I am truly humbled by your kind gesture.

I am profoundly indebted to these distinct individuals: Pastor (Dr) and Mrs Nicodemus Daniel, Mr and Mrs Ishaku Shekari, the late and Mrs Istifanus I. Madaki, and Mr and Mrs Yakubu Kantiok, Mr and Mrs Yunana Magaji and Mr and Mrs Apolos Dandaura; when it was tough and extremely hopeless, you obeyed God's voice to give me hope and a future. God, for whom you did it, will reward you for this great and undeserved accomplishment in my life. Other distinct individuals include Rev Dr and Mrs Dr Chiroma, and Pastor (Dr) and Mrs Zachariah Bulus. What you did to me, words of mouth cannot express. I am truly humbled by your kind gesture and pray to God to bless your families.

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To my beloved, beautiful, humble, dedicated, committed, understanding wife – an exceptional woman among women, Helen D Silas, and my two sons, Marvellous (Yyakazah) and Wisdom (Kazahmi) – thank you very much for your selfless sacrifices and, above all, your encouragement throughout my time away from home. May the good Lord keep us and use us as channels of blessings to the people we are called to serve.

To my late Father, who only saw the application form and made my admission known to people even when it was not yet granted, and my Mum, through whom I came to be, I remain grateful for your parental care. Dad, continue to rest in peace till we meet again. For Mum, may God keep you for me? My Father and Mother-in-law – your role in this journey cannot be forgotten; I remain grateful to you too for your understanding with me for leaving your daughter behind. May God continue to keep us together. And to my parents at Zonkwa, Mr and Mrs Patrick Bakut, I am most sincerely grateful to you for all that you did for me and what you are still doing in my life. May God keep you for me.

To my brothers and their spouses, Mr and Mrs Chindo Silas, Mr and Mrs Yunana Markus and Mr and Mrs Musa Markus, other brothers, sisters and relations – I remain grateful for your support, both in kind and in cash. May the good Lord bless you all.

Appreciation to all friends and members of the Baptist Church at Stellenbosch, and I also appreciate the ECWA fellowship members at Stellenbosch University. Many thanks goes to my friends E. Yoms, Hassan Musa, Friday Kassa, Pastor Samaila, Pastor Audu Bulus Makama, Rev. Tuduks, Mary, Baba Ali and Robert, for their advice and support during the period of this study.

To the Theology Library staff, Mrs Beulah Gericke, Heila Marè, Theresa Jooste and Annemarie Eagleton – thank you for your assistance in helping to locate and borrow books. Special thanks to my humble editor, for her diligent language and theological editing. Thanks to everyone!

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Chapter 1

The interpretation of the Parable in Luke

1.1. Introduction

This study investigates how a social-scientific reading of Luke 16:1-9 may inform the understanding of the parable of the shrewd steward and the lessons that can be derived from a close reading of the parable for the benefit of the church in Nigeria. This is, however, no easy task, as scholars like Ford (2000:10) and Herzog (1994:233) have previously stated that, of all the parables that are attributed to Jesus, the parable of the shrewd steward in Luke 16:1-9 is widely held to be among the most difficult to comprehend.

In his interpretation of the parable of the shrewd steward, Scott (1989:255) notes that "[t]he Master's praise for his unjust steward has created confusion, controversy, and embarrassment in the interpretation of the parable," for how could the master praise the servant for such an unjust act?[1] This is, however, not the only interpretative problem posed by the parable.

[1] Reinstorf (2013:3-4) has enumerated other instances in the Lucan text in which Jesus used questionable characters and states that the use of such characters by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke in particular is not unusual. An example of this is to be found in Luke 10:25-37 (the parable of the Good Samaritan). The Good Samaritan is used diaphorically as the one who does exactly what the Law demands. This, however, was not expected by an Israelite audience. Another example is the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee (Lk 18:9-14). In this parable, the Pharisee and the tax collector are also used diaphorically as the ones whose prayer was heard and answered and who go home justified before God. In both parables, unacceptable characters for 1st-century Palestine are used as positive examples of life within the kingdom of God, thereby challenging the predictable worldviews of the ancient Mediterranean world. Unlikely and unexpected as he may be, the hated Samaritan is a neighbour to the man who fell amongst the robbers, and he does what the Law commands. And the equally despised tax collector, who cheats God's own people, humbles himself before God. Although these characters were viewed

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According to Stein (1981:106), it presents numerous problems, which include: (a) the boundary thereof, (b) the question of why the master praised the steward, and (c) to what kind of audience did Jesus addressed this parable[2]. Landry and May (2000:287) add another interpretative problem: who is the *kurios* of Luke 16:8a? Is he the master of the parable, or Jesus himself?[3] While some of the interpretative challenges posed by the parable may arise because of an uncertainty about the meaning of "steward" and the financial and contractual relations involved in the concept in the first-century economy, for most contemporary readers the story is troubling simply because it appears to condone dishonesty. It is also this issue that has dominated previous attempts to interpret it.

1.2. Previous interpretations

Numerous attempts have been made in the past to interpret the parable of the shrewd steward, of which the following are the most common.

1.2.1. Allegorical interpretations

Stein (1981:42-43), who traces the history of the interpretation of parables back to the period of the early church, states that, in this period, the "allegorical method" was the dominant method used in interpreting the parables. According to him, the church fathers were greatly

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by the Israelite populace (especially the religious leaders) as deplorable, their actions within the parables of Jesus are not viewed in this way.

[2] These questions shed light on the interpretive challenge surrounding the text and will be addressed directly or indirectly in the study.

[3] In Luke 18:6, a change of subject is suggested, but that does do not occur in 16:1-8. Stein (1981:107) says, "Unless there is good reason to distinguish the use of 'master' in v.8a from v.3 and v.5, we should assume that they refer to the same person". If the parable does not end in v.7, then it is believed to end after v.8a, with v.8b a commentary on the parable (Scott 1989: 256-257). If v.8a is part of the parable, then one may say that, the "master" in v.8 is the same "master" as in v.3 and v.5.

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influenced by this method for centuries, and that before them it was popular to allegorise the heroes of Homer and their actions in order to satisfy the scruples of the morally sensitive. The church fathers applied the allegorical method of interpretation to passages in the Old Testament that appeared unacceptable to them, so that a "deeper more acceptable meaning could be found that was Christian".[4] It is the method that was also used by Jewish scholars, like Philo, as a means of demonstrating that the teachings of the Old Testament were in perfect harmony with the teachings of the Greek philosophers. This method of interpretation was at times challenged. Stein (1981:52) confirms:

> To be sure there were occasional protests raised against this methodology by the Antiochene School and by Luther and Calvin. The latter especially had a most perceptive grasp of how the parables should be interpreted, but Calvin, Luther, and the Antiochene School did not succeed in overturning the predominant use of allegory in interpreting the parable.

According to Snodgrass (2008:406-407), the parable of the shrewd steward was specifically read allegorically[5] as an argument for giving alms. In this regard, Williams (1964:293) asserts

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[4] One of the earliest examples of the use of allegories, according to Stein (1981:43), is found in the writing of Marcion. Marcion says the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-35 was actually Jesus, who appeared for the first time in history as the Good Samaritan between Jerusalem and Jericho. Stein remarks that such an interpretation fits well with his docetic teachings, because it permitted him to deny the incarnation and true humanity of Jesus. And it is important to note that the earliest known reference to the parable of the Good Samaritan treated the parable allegorically, as teaching a Christological doctrine, rather than literally, as teaching an ethical attitude (Stein 1981:43)

[5] Kim (1998:160), who does not read the parable allegorically, comes to a similar conclusion, asserting that "…although the action itself is unjust, both the prudent mode of the action and its final result, the relief of people in need, might be understood by Luke as a model for believers to follow in handling wealth entrusted by God. And for that it is reasonable that the master applauded the steward's way of using the possession for the purpose of almsgiving, and Jesus himself recommended it as a way that Christian believers as stewards should follow in

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that most allegorical interpretations of the parable appealed to the "eschatological self-interest" of its readers to give as much as possible in order to gain an eternal dwelling in the world to come.

1.2.2. Praise for the steward for being wise and not unjust

The steward's wisdom, particularly his wisdom in using money, and not his acts of dishonesty, is understood to be what is praised. According to this interpretation, the steward is a less than commendable figure who has, in this instance, acted in a commendable way. Reid (2000:194), for example, suggests that one way to solve the problem posed by the parable condoning dishonesty is to see the master's praise not as an affirmation of his wrongdoing, but as an approval of the steward's wise conduct in a crisis. His response on being informed of his dismissal by his master to secure himself a future is to be admired and emulated (Schumacher 2012:275). Ireland (1989:255) agrees that, "until at least the middle of the twentieth century, the most common interpretation of the parable is that which views the actions of the steward toward the debtors as fraudulent but nevertheless draws from those actions a positive lesson about prudence or wisdom in the use of material possession." This line of interpretation does not deny the dishonest act of the steward, but stresses that this is not what is being praised.

1.2.3. Praise for the remittance of unlawful financial gain

Another interpretation, which is closely connected to the abovementioned one, has to do with the suggestion that the steward got his master's favour by deducting either unlawful penalties, or his own commission, from the debts owed to the master. According to Stein (1981:108-109), the steward was simply deducting or eliminating his own interest, which he had added to that his master was collecting on the principal. In view of this, the steward's dishonest acts can be viewed as legal, since the charging of interest, legally forbidden by the Torah (Deut. 23:19-20) was now remitted by him. Otherwise the steward was simply eliminating or removing his personal interest and implying that the master of the steward lost nothing himself.

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managing wealth given and entrusted to them by God. As such, it is suggested that that is an exhortation of how a steward uses his possessions rightly…".

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This line of interpretation for understanding the steward as acting in a financially responsible manner has its own problems, since (a) the action of the steward would have been an unlawful reduction since the money did not belong to him, as the parable clearly states that the entire sum was owed to the master (v. 5); and (b) Kloppenborg (1989:474) has shown that, while Jewish landowners often assigned unlawful interest rates in their contracts, the percentages subtracted by the steward do not correlate with those normally added as commission. Additionally, these explanations assume familiarity with legal customs that neither Jesus' nor Luke's audience probably observed. Gagnon (1998:3) has also argued that the manager is depicted as a despicable character in the entire parable base on his dishonest act. The owner tells him to clear out his desk and to give him a final report of his financial dealings, because he had anonymously received information that the manager had been "squandering his property" (vs. 1-2). The steward, however, is too lazy to do manual labour and too proud to beg for money (v. 3), therefore he decides to use his master's money as a means by which to make friends among his master's debtors by going to each and unilaterally discounting their debts by twenty to fifty percent. The reason given for his remittance of the debts of the debtors is thus his laziness and fear, and not his respect for the Torah or concern for the poor.

1.2.4. Praise for restoring the honour of the master

According to this interpretation, the steward's actions were deceitful, but were nevertheless worthy of praise on account of his gaining of public appreciation for the master, who received honour for appearing to concede to such generous benefaction towards his debtors. In this regard, Landry and May (2000:298) have stated that the question of what is at stake for the master in a situation in which he is told by others that his steward is squandering his property is not as obvious as it may first appear. While most modern readers simply assume that the owner is upset by the decrease in the value of his assets, caused either by the failure of the steward to bring a sufficiently high return on his investments, or by the steward's misappropriation of the master's funds for personal gain, the owner may have a different understanding of what had transpired.

According to Landry and May (2000:298), in the Jewish and first-century world of the New Testament time, honour was just as important as wealth, if not more. The social status and honour of a male head of a household, like the rich man in the parable under consideration,

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was tied to power, which was understood in the ancient world as the ability to exercise control over the behaviour of others. It was not only a matter of having control over employees, but also about being seen as being in control of your affairs. So, having a steward who squandered his property would make the master dishonourable among his peers as the master will be seen as not being able to control his affairs.

1.2.5. Praise for finding a new home

In view of the text in question, one might be right in saying that, while the steward's actions were unrighteous in the eyes of both the master and Jesus, he might have received praise specifically for his inspired attempt to find a new home. However, the passage does not distinguish between the steward's foresight and the ethical nature of the actions performed. Furthermore, if the steward's actions were indeed fraudulent, then it is unlikely that he would have successfully found a new home (or future employment) with the master's debtors, since they would have every reason to believe that the steward would commit similar crimes against them.

1.3. The interpretation of parables in general

As can be seen from the brief survey of the interpretation of the parable of the shrewd steward (section 1.1), numerous interpretative difficulties have been presented to interpreters and thus warrant careful study. In order to interpret the parable in question correctly, it is necessary to first understand the genre of parables. This chapter therefore will give a brief overview of the genre of the parable before stating the research problem, the methodology and the scope of the study.

Stein (1981:17) has stated that, of all the forms of all genres attributed to Jesus, by far the most familiar and striking is that of the parable – "[t]he amount of parabolic material contained in our Gospels is quite impressive, for it is estimated that over one third of the teachings of Jesus found in the first three Gospels is to be found in parables". In agreement with Stein, Anderson (2013:651) claims that there is no generally accepted characteristic feature of the proclamation attributed to Jesus, other than that he spoke in parables, and no aspect of his teaching is more memorable and influential than these unassuming similes and vivid stories.

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The parables of Jesus have been the source of both fascination and perplexity, ever since they were first pronounced almost two millennia ago (Ireland 1992:1). The parables challenge, and even disturb, the reader or the hearer because, for all their superficial simplicity, the impression remains that something more is involved than meets the eye or ear, and that there is a depth of meaning which one may not have completely grasped (Ireland 1992:1). It therefore is not surprising that they have been the subject of much rigorous analysis, hermeneutical experimentation and controversy. This is to be expected, since the parables are regarded by some scholars, if not most of the critical era, as the strand of the Jesus tradition that, more than any other, sheds light on Jesus' history, aims, ethics and even self-understanding (Anderson 2013:65).

According to Hedrick (2009:373), early Christians viewed the parables in a variety of ways. In some instances they regarded them as elaborate allegories.[6] For example, the sower in Mark 4:3-8 appears to be a narrative about farming, but Mark explains it as referring to evangelism. The elements of the narrative are thus, according to him, not what they appear to be on the surface. The sower is not a farmer, but a preacher. The birds are not birds, but the evil one. The seed is not seed, but God's word. The different soils are not dirt, but kinds of hearers, the hazards faced by the seeds are difficulties facing the first-century evangelists. The various elements in the parable are thus representing different things entirely.

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[6] An allegory is a deliberately composed narrative whose various elements are created by the author to signify something different from what they are (Hedrick 2009:373). Hedrick (2009:373) states that, besides the parable of the sower, only two other narrative parables recorded in the Gospel of Mathew are given extensive allegorical interpretations. They are the "Good Seed and Weeds" (Mt 13:24-30, 37-43) and "A Net Thrown Into the Sea" (Mt 13:47-50). Apart from these there are other narrative parables and literary types that include simile and similitude (a brief comparison using "like" or "as"), in which the behaviour in the story should be emulated, and exhortations, which teach morality and practice. Many of the narrative parables are comparisons to the Kingdom of God/Heaven/Father.

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In this study below an attempt will be made to discern the literary function of parables (1.2.1) in order to determine the approach by which to interpret Luke 16:1-9 (1.2.2).

1.3.1. The literary function of parables

In our church's Sunday school we were told by our teachers that a parable is simply an "earthly story with a heavenly meaning", while the *Longman Dictionary* (2009) defines a parable as a "simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson", or as "a short simple story that teaches a moral or religious lesson, especially one of the stories told by Jesus in the Bible." However, these definitions, which view a parable as a story that aims to convey a moral or spiritual principle, explain only what a parable means to a modern English speaker. Since the New Testament was originally not written in English, or in the twenty-first century, it is important to look at the term parable in Greek, as it was used in the time of Jesus. The etymology of the Greek word *parable*,[7] according to Anderson (2013:65), comes from *para* ("beside") and *bolle* ("to cast"), meaning "to create the image of something else". Similarly, Scott (1989:19) states that "parable means literally 'to set beside', 'to throw beside', and thus functions as a comprehensive term, indicating similarity or parallelism. The notion of being thrown beside or of parallelism in the signified of *parabole* makes it an appropriate translation for *mashal,* which also implies a comparative notion in the sense of parallel". According to Hedrick (2009:368), the LXX (Septuagint) regularly uses the term *parabole* in order to translate the term *mashal*, which is used in the Hebrew Testament for literary units whose meaning is not immediately clear or easily understood. These literary units can be a narrative, a brief figure, a traditional proverb, a lament cast as a brief narrative, or even a riddle.[8] Stein

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[7] A *parabole* was the Greek term for an illustration, a comparison, or an analogy, usually in story form, using common events of daily life to teach or reveal a moral or spiritual truth (Anderson 2013:65).

[8] Psalm 49:4; Psalm 49:5, 78:2; Proverbs 1:6; Ezekiel 17:2-10, 24:3-5, 24:13; 18:2, 19:1-9; Micah 2:4; Habakuk 2:5-6. Habakuk 2:6 is also a type of obscure or enigmatic speech (Hedrick 2009:368).

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(1981:16-18) adds that a parable is “a simple proverb, byword, satire, or a word of derision or even to a story parable or allegory as further examples”.[9]

It is clear from the above discussion that the literal form of a *mashal* includes a much wider variety of concepts than simply stories that contain moral or spiritual truths. Parables in the ancient world were much more than illustrations, and although some were concerned with future eschatology, they were not about heaven. They were directed to life on this earth (Snodgrass 2008:7). In the New Testament, the term parable is also used in a variety of ways, as in the Old Testament. As in the Old Testament, it can be a reference to a proverb, a metaphor or figurative saying. Other possibilities include similitude, story parable and allegory.

1.3.2. Luke’s use of parables

In terms of the discussion above, the understanding of the function of the parables in Luke should not be undertaken from the perspective of a modern definition of what a parable is but from the tradition that shaped the New Testament. In this regard, Scott (1989:27) has stated that, among the Synoptic Gospels, only Luke employs a range of usages of parables that begin to correspond to that of the *mashal* in the Old Testament. Luke also diverges from the other Synoptic Gospels in having no collection or groups of parables. Luke normally structures his parable around a single individual.[10] In view of this, Scott defines a *mashal* (or parable) in Luke as a story that employs a short narrative fiction to reference a transcendent symbol.

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[9] Ezekiel 18:2-3; 1 Samuel 24:13, 10:12; Ezekiel, 12:22-23; 16:14; Isaiah 14:3-4; Habakuk 2:6; Ezekiel 17:2-10 and 20:49 to 21:5. There are three other examples in the Old Testament of this kind of *mashal* where the term itself is not used. Despite the absence of the term in these instances, however, it is quite clear that they are examples of *mashalim*. The most famous of these is the well-known parable of Nathan in 2 Samuel 12:1-4. The two terms are used in 2 Samuel 14:1-11 and Isaiah 5:1-7 (Stein 1981:16-18).

[10] Luke 8:4-18 and Mark 8:4, 9; 20:9, 19.

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Hedrick (2009:373) furthermore states that, in the Synoptic Gospels, narrative proverbs, simple forthright discourse and other sayings with a proverbial character are designated "parables" by the Evangelists,[11] which generally means that they have a deeper religious meaning for them. Thus early Christian literature appears to designate as a "parable" any saying of Jesus whose meaning is not immediately clear in terms of Christian faith and theology. The reason for this view was that Jesus, being who he was according to the faith of the church, was assumed not to speak superficially about everyday occurrences. Therefore, what appears to be predictable, ordinary language is judged by them to be figurative or comparative discourse with a deeper significance. If the stories they tell are read for themselves, rather than for an underlying religious or moral significance, they are found to present ordinary matters, for example, such as the hiring and paying of day labourers, dishonest employees and two men praying in the temple.[12] According to Hedrick (2009:373), the parables realistically portray first-century village life in Palestine. But, since the second half of the first century, the practicality of the stories has generally been ignored in favour of pursuing the religious meaning of these essentially secular stories. Hedrick (2009:368), for example, has described the parables as a type of speech that carries a representation from one thing to another and that is used in an argument to clarify, attest or vivify. For him, a parable functions as a short story with a moral meaning, in that it is an example of proper or inappropriate behaviour. In the same vein, Scott (1989:28) observes that, in the simplest way, a parable can be seen as a metaphor or simile that is drawn from nature or common day-to-day life in order to capture the hearer's attention by its vividness or strangeness.

According to Gaechter (1950:121), parables were a favourite means of teaching among the rabbis in Israel at the time of Jesus, so much so that they developed a standard form. However, this form alone does not make a good parable. A good parable, if judged by literary or aesthetical standards, has not only to be shaped after the standard form, but its metaphoric part also has to be true to life so as to be clearly distinguishable from a fable. In this respect, the

[11] Mathew, Mark and Luke.

[12] Luke 15:11-32; 15:8-9.

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parables of Jesus are tools or methods of teaching that he apparently used during his earthly life and ministry. While the parables of Jesus can clearly be understood in terms of Jewish *mashalim*, they also have unique features. For example, they are generally less judgemental and more provocative, more self-referential, and more eschatological than their rabbinic counterparts (Gaechter 1950:121),

From the discussion above it can be concluded that the Lukan understanding of a parable is more than "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning". In both the Old and New Testament as earlier observed reflected in the use of the word in Luke, *mashal* or *parable* can refer to a proverb, a simile, a riddle or a metaphor, as well as to various kinds of story types. It can be described as an expanded analogy used to convince and persuade hearers. This is the way the ancient Greeks used the term, and this description is sufficiently broad to cover the majority of the ways the Evangelists (Luke) used the word (Snodgrass 2008:9).

1.4. Methodology for Interpreting the Parables

Snodgrass (2008:24), who outlined eleven points on how a parable should be interpreted, states that "parables are not lists of information; they are stories, but they may not be the stories we think they are. Each must be approached and dealt with on its own grounds, not with some predetermined view as to what parables must be like and do". In view of this, he emphasises that the interpreter should cultivate a "willingness to hear and respond appropriately". Snodgrass' eleven points that outline how to interpret a parable are the following:

1. Analyse each parable thoroughly.

2. Listen to the parable without presupposition as to its form or meaning.

3. Remember that Jesus' parables were oral instruments in a largely oral culture.

4. If we are after the intent of Jesus, we must seek to hear a parable as Jesus' Palestinian hearers would have heard it.

5. Note how each parable and its redactional shaping fit with the purpose and plan of each Evangelist.

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6. Determine specifically the function of the story in the teaching of Jesus.

7. Interpret what is given, not what is omitted. Any attempt to interpret a parable based on what is not there is almost certainly wrong.

8. Do not impose real time on parable time.

9. Pay particular attention to the rule of end stress.

10. Note where the teaching of the parables intersects with the teaching of Jesus elsewhere.

11. Determine the theological intent and significance of the parable.

Stein (1981:72-79) has enumerated four ways of interpreting the parables for today.

1. Seek the one main point of the parable.
2. Seek to understand the *Sitz im Leben* in which the parable was uttered.
3. Seek to understand how the Evangelist interpreted the parable.
4. Seek what God is saying to us through the parable today.

Looking at the two scholars cited above, one could say that they seem to be saying the same thing. In view of the social-scientific methodology applied in this study, these suggestions should not be taken as a fixed methodology, but rather as critical points of considerations in the reading of a parable. As such they will be addressed as part of the social-scientific approach employed in this study. For example, Snodgrass's points 1, 2 ,3, 10, 11 and Stein's points 1, 2 and 4 are relevant for this study and therefore will be addressed as they occur.

1.5. Research question, methodology and the scope of the study

As already stated, understanding the praise bestowed on a dishonest and shrewd steward as presented in the parable in Luke 16:1-9 has been problematic for interpreters. In light of this, the primary research question of this study is: *Why is the dishonest steward praised in Luke 16:1-9 and can a social-scientific study of the parable of the dishonest steward result in a better*

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understanding thereof? On a personal note, my interest in this parable stems from my African, specifically Nigerian, background and the need for faithful stewards in Nigerian society, if not in most African societies.

The scope of the research to be undertaken entails an interpretation of Luke 16:1-9 by using a combination of two methodological approaches: a verse-by-verse analysis of the text (i.e. a close reading of the text), combined with a social-scientific approach. The social-scientific reading of the text that will be carried out in chapter three will thus be based on a close reading of the text. According to Van Eck (2009:1), the social-scientific method is an exegetical method that analyses texts in terms of their strategy (the pragmatic and rhetorical dimensions of the text) and situation, i.e. the social circumstances in which the text was produced. According to Barton (1995:76), this method includes sociological, social or cultural anthropological and psychological insights, since the disciplines of sociology, anthropology and psychology have the potential for shedding new light on the world behind the text (the world of the author), the world within the text (the narrated world of the characters), intentions and events and, lastly, the world in front of the text (the world of the reader).

In the past, social-scientific studies have created models with which to understand the first-century Mediterranean world. According to Herzog (1994:2), his social-scientific approach, which this study utilises, specifically involves the study of the so-called macrosociology of advanced agrarian societies, and the way economics was practised in the first-century Mediterranean world. The research is also complemented by work in cognate areas, such as patron-client relations (3.2.2) and the role of hospitality (3.2.4) in antiquity. In view of the definition from the scholars above, the insight of Herzog alongside that of Combrink and Scott will be used in the social-scientific reading of the parable. This is not only because of their knowledge on the social-scientific method, but because they have also applied the same method in their study of the parable (or others) and their work. The researcher also incorporated insights of other scholars in the field of social-science and thus follows an eclectic approach to social-scientific studies instead of following a particular model of a specific scholar.

The concept of the "steward" is one that occurs in a variety of contexts in both the Old and New Testaments. While reference will be made to other instances of the use of the concept (3.3.1), this will be done only insofar as this may explain its use and meaning in Luke 16:1-9.

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Luke 16:1-31 contains two parables. According to the NIV, vs.1-15 can be demarcated as "The Parable of the Shrewd Manager", while vs. 16-18 is described as "Additional Teachings" and vs. 19-31 as "The Rich Man and Lazarus". A critical look will show that the parable is contained in vs. 1-9, and that vs. 10-15 are an application thereof. And though reference may be made to the other sections of the chapter in question, the research focuses mainly on the parable of the shrewd steward (especially vs. 1-9) rather than the two parables.

1.6. Conclusion

In this chapter a brief history of the interpretation of the parable of the shrewd steward was given, before the literary function of the Gospel parables was clarified. The research question, methodology to be used and the scope of the study were also outlined, namely that the study intends to undertake an exposition of Luke 16:1-9, starting with the text demarcation (2.3), the translation thereof (2.4), followed by a verse-by-verse interpretation in the light of the social context of the book of Luke in general (3.2), and the parable of the dishonest steward in particular (3.3).

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Chapter 2

The literary context of the parable of the shrewd steward

2.1. Introduction

The interpretation of the parable of the shrewd steward[13] in Luke 16:1-9 has posed a considerable challenge to scholars in the past. According to Goodrich (2012:547), Schumacher (2012:269) and DE Silva (1993:258), it can be described as one of the most difficult parables in all of the Synoptic Gospels. In this regard, Kendall (1949:133) has noted that it is not just difficult for modern readers, since the evangelist himself, or a later redactor, was also puzzled by the phrase "make friends for yourselves in the world of dishonest profiteers", because he has inserted a miscellaneous collection of sayings (Lk 16:9-13) into the section after the parable that have nothing in common with the parable, except that they also address the correct use of wealth, dishonesty in the matter of a trust, or the temptations of wealth.

In order to investigate the meaning of Luke 16:1-9, a translation thereof, as well as its demarcation, will be briefly discussed in this chapter, after its place within the plot of Luke has been considered (2.2). The latter is important because, as Ireland (1992:1-2) states,

> To understand a text properly one must interpret it in its context as this method is no less valid for the parable of Jesus than it is for any other text biblical or otherwise. The gospel writers have set the parables in particular context, ranging from the immediate to the broad; each of those contexts can play an important part in elucidating the meaning of the parable in question.

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[13] The different names of the parable, which include "unjust Steward", "Dishonest Manager", "Shrewd Manager", "Foolish Master" or "Dishonourable Master", reflect the conflicting ways in which the parable have been read. The choice of the name "the shrewd steward" by the researcher is motivated by the researcher's intention to search the text using questions in order to see what can be learned to teach the proper use of possessions.

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In view of the quotation above the remaining part of this chapter focuses on the literary context of the pericope. The macro and micro literary context will be considered as well as the demarcation of the text and the researcher's own translation of the text.

2.2. The literary context of Luke 16:1-9

Before looking at the immediate literary context of the text in question, it is necessary to have a brief look at the outline of the Gospel of Luke – its macro-literary context.

According to Ringe (2002:66), the macro-structure of the Gospel of Luke is first of all determined by its biographical nature, in that it begins with an account of Jesus' conception, birth, and the circumstances of his call into public ministry, followed by an account of his ministry, which ends with his arrest. Then follows his administrative hearings, sentencing and execution. In between this period and Luke's second book (Acts), there is a bridge between Jesus' story and the story of the early Church that features an account of the risen Christ and his appearance and commissioning of his followers to continue with his earthly ministry.

The macro-structure of Luke is determined secondly by the geographical interest of Luke. The Gospel of Luke begins in Nazareth (1:26-38) but, after the birth of Jesus, the centre shifts to Jerusalem and especially the temple (Chap. 2). The account of John the Baptist is set in the region around Judah (3:3), and Jesus is said to have remained in the wilderness, wrestling with Satan (4:1-13), before the start of his ministry in his home town (4:16-30). In Luke 9:51, the Lukan Jesus sets about going to Jerusalem – a long journey that ends in 19:28. This extended section, which can be depicted as a travel narrative, takes up roughly one-third of the entire Gospel (Holladay 2005:163). It is also replete with the teaching of and stories about Jesus, designed to prepare Jesus' followers for their life without him (Ringe 2002:67).

Culpepper (2005:77) stresses the role of the prologue, which gives a picture of the author's historical credentials and guarantees the reliability of his biography of Jesus. He also views the events that surrounded the birth of Jesus, whom he refers to as a hero, serving as a divine sign of his future greatness. Jesus' youth, on the other hand, serves to foreshadow the work he will do in his maturity, and the beginning of his public life also characterises the importance of the work Jesus is about to do. The heart of the Gospel of Luke records Jesus' mighty acts and sage

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teachings. Like Ringe, Culpepper has also stated that the Gospel ends with Jesus' farewell discourse, followed by his death, the mysterious events that followed that, and his last words to his followers. Powell (2009:148-149) likewise emphasises the brief dedication to Theophilus (1:1-4), and the concluding account of Jesus' passion, resurrection and words of blessing to his disciples before ascending to heaven (22:1-24:49, 24:50-53), as the literary frame according to which the Gospel of Luke needs to be read.

The intention of the following brief outline of Luke is to give an indication of where the parable of the shrewd steward fits into Luke's narrative. It is based on the outlines of Culpepper (2005:77) and Holladay (2005:161-164).

Luke 1:1-4	The prologue
Luke 1:5-2:52	The infancy narrative
Luke 3:1-4:13	Preparation for the ministry of Jesus
Luke 4:14-9:50	The ministry in Galilee
Luke 9:51-19:27	The travel narrative: Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem
Luke 19:28-21:38	The ministry in Jerusalem
Luke 22:1-24:53	The Passion and Resurrection narratives

It is clear from the outline above that the parable of the shrewd manager is located in the long travel narrative, which covers one-third of the entire Gospel of Luke. In regard to the literary context of Luke 16:1-9, Ireland (1992:16) suggests that the beginning of the parable of the shrewd steward is indicated by Luke's introduction of the parable in Luke 16:1, since there is a change in the audience (*elegen de kai pros tous mathetas*) when compared to that in 15:1-3. There is, however, also a continuation between Luke 15 and 16:1-13, since the parable is told by Jesus at the same time and under the same circumstances as the parables in chapter 15. Ireland (1992:58) agrees with this assessment by stating that "Luke's introduction to the parable of the unjust steward suggests that whatever the message, it is primarily directed by Jesus to his disciples. It is also in some sense a sequel to the three parables in Luke 15". Luke 16:1-9 can thus not be interpreted without considering the parables in Luke 15.

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Schweizer (1984:253), who describes Luke 16:1-13 under the title, "Liberation for God's Future", compares the steward's action with that of the prodigal son in Luke 15:13, and explains that both parables emphasise the making of a decision in order to live in the present and to have an assured future. Nolland (1993:795) expresses the same view by naming the preceding passage, "What Am I Going to Do?" He explains that "a series of links suggest that the sections in both Luke 15 and 16 are to be read in close relation to one another. There is a carefully constructed continuity of scene; while both are chapters of extended narrative parables".[14] Ireland (1992:58-59) adds that the opening phrase of Luke 16:1 (*elegen de kai*) expresses at least conceptual continuity between what has been said in Luke 15 and what is about to be said in Luke 16. As in Luke 15:11-12, where it is the father who is the focus of attention and the one who conveys God's costly love, so in Luke 16:1-8 the focus is on the one who can be seen as foolish and who does not operate according to the normal expectations of anyone in power. It reveals a God who is unlike one who exacts punishment, but one who gives time and cancels debts in the midst of sins.

Whereas the parables in Luke 15 are addressed to the Pharisees to counter their rigidity, the parable of the shrewd steward is addressed to the disciples, as recorded in Luke 16:1, to teach them how gracious God is and to inculcate the same attitude in their hearts as future Christian leaders (Reid 2000:200-201). The parable, which forms part of Luke's travel narratives, as observed earlier in this thesis, gives a description of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, where he expected his ministry and life to be cut short (Lk. 12:50; 13:33-34). The twist in 16:8a is that God, like the master in the parable in question, does indeed approve the action of Jesus, as he releases sinners from their debts even when they do not deserve it.

Stein (1994:415), who focuses on 16:1-8, but also interpreted the parable of the dishonest manager in the light of the whole chapter as a unit, which centres around the theme of the proper use of possessions and wealth, denies any connection between it and the preceding text,

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[14] The final parable in each set involves three main figures arranged in a somewhat similar configuration; there are vocabulary links that emphasise the links between the final parable of Luke 15 and the opening parable of Luke 16 (Nolland 1993:795).

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however.[15] Reinstorf (2002:1288), while reflecting on this theme in his treatment of Luke's theology, states that the theme is part of Luke's concern for the poor and marginalised in his community. On the other hand, the Lukan Jesus is often portrayed as warning people against the peril of trusting in wealth for their security. Reinstorf (2002:1288) has pointed out how each parable, which includes the parable of the rich fool (12:12-21), the parable of the great feast (14:15-23), the parable of the shrewd steward (16:1-13) and that of the rich man and Lazarus (16:1-13) in the central Lukan narrative, focuses on the theme of wealth and possession and is followed by teachings on the same theme and a call for a total renunciation of wealth as a true sign of discipleship and, at the same time, encourages a proper stewardship of possessions.

The abovementioned explains how the parable under consideration connects to the preceding and the following passages, and how it also relates to the entire Lukan theme of wealth and possessions. It fits into Luke's theology and his concern for the proper stewardship of wealth and possessions in a mixed community consisting of both rich and poor. In this regard, Marshall (1994:1006), who also views the parable within the chapter as a whole, writes:

> "Warning about wealth" stated that "After showing his concern for the poor and the outcast, Jesus gives some warnings against avarice and wealth vs. 14, 19 which are directed to people who were in danger of failing to respond to the gospel before it was too late. They should in any case have listened to the teachings of the Old Testament scriptures about the moral law of God, which remains permanently a valid saying on these and related topics have been gathered together, so that the chapter also has something to say about the disciples' attitude to wealth.

According to Barton and Muddiman (2000:945), the parable of the dishonest steward and Luke 15 have revealed a common standpoint, which is developed in a unified manner. For Ireland

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[15] His second demarcation covers vs. 9-18 with the title "Sayings on Stewardship", which he views as inserted by Luke in between the parables. The third demarcation covers vs. 19-31, titled "The rich man and Lazarus", which he says is connected to the preceding as an example of a man who is a lover of money, who foolishly made poor use of his possessions, and as an example of the continued validity of the Law and prophets (Stein 1994:415).

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(1992:121), Luke 15 is important for its interpretation of the parable of the shrewd steward, since:

> the polemic nature of Jesus' apologetic in chapter 15 sharpens his teaching to the disciples in Luke 16:1-23 and gives it a note of urgency. His teaching about the beneficent use of possessions in Luke 16:1-23 does not arise in a vacuum, but is motivated by a real threat to the disciples' wholehearted service of God. It is a threat exemplified in the Pharisees. They cannot serve God and Mammon, Jesus warns his disciples in v. 13. Serving mammon or greed and serving God are mutually exclusive loyalties and pursuits.

This is firmly supported by Ireland, who states how the verses that follow the parable in question jointly fall in two parts, vs. 14-18 and vs. 19-31. The former, according to him, deal with the law and the kingdom of God, while the latter part is the familiar parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Both parts are logically and thematically related to each other, and to vs. 1-13. The basic thing to be understood is that Luke 16:14-31 continues and amplifies the controversy with the Pharisees (Lk 15), which once again came into play in Luke 16:14-31. The latter verses are also directed to the opponents. In the same vein, however, these verses serve to support Jesus' teaching in vs. 1-13 on the parable in question, and serve as a warning to the disciples of Jesus of the consequences involved in serving God and mammon – in other word of being lovers of money and not using their possession for the poor.

In view of the argument made above, it is important to take the literary context of Luke 16:1-9 into consideration in the interpretation thereof. As stated earlier, the theme of wealth and possessions is related to the Lukan concern for the poor and the marginalised.[16] Reinstorf (2002:1288) has also emphasised the theme of wealth and possession in the parables of Luke, such as in relation to the rich fool (12:12-21), the Great Feast (14:15-23), the dishonest manager (16:1-13), and the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31). Each of these parables is also followed immediately by teaching on the same theme. From this focus it is clear that, on the one hand, Luke stresses the total renunciation of goods as the cost of discipleship, while also encouraging the good stewardship of wealth. According to Ireland (1992:160), "The thematic connections

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[16] The Lukan Jesus is repeatedly portrayed as warning people against the danger of trusting in material wealth and security.

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between our parable and other passages in the central section for example Luke 14:25-35 indicates that the faithful stewardship exhorted in the parable is an integral part of genuine discipleship".

The parable and its applications in Luke 16:1-13 teach the charitable use of material possessions against an eschatological background (DE Silva 1993:267). They combine the themes of the proper use of wealth and the decisive devotion to a plan in times of crisis, with the abiding demand of the law, which come together in laying aside one's devotion to wealth, power and position in order to serve the powerless and the poor.

Puica (2009:33-34) has also argued that Luke 16 is about responsible stewardship. According to him, the two parables in Luke 16:1-8 and 19-31 are linked to other parables and teachings in Luke's travel narrative that feature a rich person.[17] In each case, wealth poses a problem expressed in a parable or a narrative. Puica (2009:34) further suggests that the two parables in Luke 16 need to be understood together, since both begin with the words "There was a certain rich man".[18] Obedient stewardship is demonstrated positively by the shrewd steward (Lk 16:1-8) and Jesus' application of the parable in vs. 9-13, while disobedient stewardship is demonstrated negatively by the rich man (vs. 19-31), who stores up treasure for himself on earth. The two parables thus call for responsible stewardship in the present with a view to the impending future.

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[17] Examples of the rich in the parables of Jesus in Luke are the parable of the rich fool, the land of a rich man that brought forth a plentiful harvest; the parable of the dishonest manager; the rich man and Lazarus; the rich ruler and Zacchaeus (who was a chief tax collector).

[18] Puica (2009:34) argues that the beginning of the two parables in Luke 16 links them to the explicit command of Jesus in Luke 12:33, to "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourself that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (NIV).

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It is thus clear that the parable of the unjust steward cannot be disconnected from its immediate and broader literary context, which provides valuable insight into it. In this regard, Bowen (2001:314-315) has suggested that the key to understanding the parable is to consider the parable's setting in the Gospel. He proposes that this parable is only properly interpreted when it is viewed as the fourth in a series of five parables, beginning with the parable of the lost sheep and leading to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Bowen (2001:315) states that the parable of the lost son, in the dialogue between the father and the son, provides the ground for understanding the parable of the unjust steward. The steward's goal was for people to welcome him into their homes. Like the elder son in the previous parable of the prodigal son, the steward did not want to entrust his future to an unmerited welcome, but rather to his own action. For that he went ahead to reduce the debts of his master's debtors. This implies that the steward himself was mindful of his honour and that of his master as the discussion in chapter three will make clear.

2.3. **The demarcation of the shrewd steward**

The determination of where the parable of the shrewd manager ends is important, since it determines the relationship between it and the following series of sayings (vs. 10-13), which can be understood as clarifying its meaning. The argument is that Luke was, just like everyone else, confused by the parable and therefore tried, somewhat unsuccessfully, to conform it to moralistic themes such as being faithful in stewardship and almsgiving (Schellenberg 2008:263-264). Others, however, have disputed that the sayings following the parable are linked to its meaning. Herzog (1994:233-53), for instance, has asked why Luke would emphasise a saying like the one recorded in vs. 9-13, which is more obscure than the parable itself, to clarify its meaning? The demarcation of the parable from the attached saying is therefore important, since there currently is no consensus on where the parable ends.[19]

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[19] It seems there is agreement that the story concludes at v. 8, and that *hoi kurios* (the lord) there represents the parabolic master, although perhaps speaking with the voice of Jesus. Schellenberg (2008:264-265) labels this the "majority position" and "the current consensus".

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While Landry and May (2000:288) have noted that there is broad agreement amongst scholars that the story told by the parable proceeds at least to v. 7, and that the interpretation of the parable either by Jesus or the narrator begins at the latest in verse v. 8b,[20] Moore (1965:104), who has interpreted the parable in relation to Luke's concern for the poor in his Gospel,[21] states that, if the parable in question ends at v. 7 or v. 8a, its originally intended meaning would be understood as teaching the wisdom of leaving no stone unturned in making the future secure. But if that is the form in which Luke originally received the parable, it appears that Luke drew out a more specific lesson, and if v. 9 can be taken as Luke's immediate application of the parable in question, one can, by reference to Luke's peculiar presentation with the kingdom in view, discover the message Luke intended to convey. Moore further explains that the Gospel of Luke is the gospel of the poor, and that the kingdom is theirs as well. He explains, on the one hand, how the announcement of the coming kingdom was first of all good news to the poor and, on the other hand, a warning to the rich that, as long as they used their wealth for their own selfish ends, this would disqualify themselves from entry into the new order. This is very significant for Luke's interpretation of the parable of the shrewd steward, which is followed by that of the rich man and Lazarus and most importantly, relates to both the poor and the rich in African society, and in Nigeria in particular

Herzog (1994:235) has also stated that "the parable implicitly criticises the censoriousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, whose efforts are aimed at alienating the very people they would

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[20] Another demarcation that views the parable as having two parts is that of Snodgrass (2008:402), who argues that "[t]his is a single indirect narrative parable that is also a "how much more" parable. It has a concluding explanation in v. 8b and an application in v. 9".

[21] Luke 2:52-53 explains how the rich people have been pulled down from their seats of power and the poor enthroned. The poor (hungry) are said to have been filled with goods and the rich have gone away empty handed. In Luke 3:10-11 the challenge is followed with a question by the rich, on what to do, and a response challenging them to share what they have with those who lack. In Luke 4:18, the concern for the poor is shown by Luke stating that Jesus was anointed to preach to the poor and proclaim blessings on them, while woes await the rich (Lk 6:20-21, 12:16-16). Luke 12:14 challenges the normal system of his community, which was programmed in such a way that the rich always invited their friends of the same social status for dinner, by encouraging them rather to invite the lame, the blind and poor, who do not have the means to pay them back.

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do better to court with kindness and friendship". This concern for the poor is given a distinctively Lukan twist in v. 9, which introduces the theme of wealth. All these scholars view the application, as added by the evangelist, as one to his immediate audience and as a call for the proper use of wealth. For Reid (2000:195-197), the catchword in v. 9, "dishonest", is the same word that is used to describe the steward in v. 8. Verse 9 is generally interpreted as an exhortation to use money shrewdly to one's own advantage in order to ensure an eternal dwelling. The reference made to eternal dwellings also brings in an eschatological tone.

A further interpretative difficulty is how to understand the meaning of "dishonest wealth" in v. 9. Is it only a reference to wealth gained unjustly?[22] Reid (2000:196) claims that a new contrast is introduced here between great and small matters, dishonest versus true wealth (v. 11) and between what belongs to another versus what one owns (v. 13). The first, which refers to great and small matters, is a simple proverb, but it does not correspond to what happened in the parable itself. The second and the third (dishonest versus true wealth and what belongs to another versus what one owns) pick up on the movement toward eternal realities introduced in v. 9, making true wealth and what is yours references to imperishable treasures, similar to Luke 12:33. Verse 13 constructs yet another contrast between serving God and serving mammon, but the parable itself does not address this dilemma.[23]

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[22] "The precise meaning of Luke 16:9 is not quite clear. Jesus exhorts his disciples to use worldly wealth to gain friends for themselves but does not specify who those friends are or how they are to be gained" (Ireland 1992:196).

[23] This saying is consonant with Luke's concern for one being rich toward God in 12:21 (Reid 2000:196-197). Luke constantly warns about the danger of becoming enslaved by money (Ireland 1992:175). This is apparent in the woes of the sermon on the plain in 16:24-26. It is also prominent in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). Two other passages merit careful consideration because of the important part they play in this particular emphasis. These are the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 12:13-21) and the parable of the rich fool (Lk 18:18-30), where the verses that follow them introduce a long teaching on material possessions. In these teaching sections, Jesus warns the crowds against an attachment to riches, and exhorts his disciples to have total confidence in God. The parable of the rich ruler provides an example for wealthy believers to, instead of wasting their money or resources, rather use these in the service of God. Examples of such believers include Levi, who gave a banquet for Jesus (Lk 5:29); the woman who uses her expensive ointment to anoint Jesus (Lk 7:37-50); the Galilean woman who hands out her monetary resources (Lk 8:3); Zacchaeus, who gave half of

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In view of the ending of the parable, Reid states that, "[w]hile all these added sayings in vs. 8b-13 have verbal links with the parable, none of them elucidates the meaning of v. 8a. All of them have domesticated the parable, dulling its startling twist by reducing it to proverbial platitudes". Reid, who still looks at the parable as having "endless interpretive difficulties", states that the only thing about which there is substantial consensus among scholars is that the saying at the conclusion of the parable is loosely linked to it and functions like notes for different homilies by the parable's first interpreters. He thus denies a direct link between vs. 8b-13 and the parable and views it as having ended in an unexpected way (Reid 2000:194). If this is the case, v. 8a still remains a challenge to interpret.

Regarding the parable ending, which the writer observed earlier above, the argument of those who favour v. 7 as the ending of the parable argue that it is unlikely that Jesus would have praised this manager. Adding to this, the words of DE Silva (1993:256) are to be noted:

> It seems likely, however, that those who end the parable in v. 8 have the strongest arguments on their side. It is not appropriate for the end of a parable concerned with depicting the kingdom to have such an ending. One recalls the action of the landlord and the labourers in the vineyard story of the father in the parable of the prodigal son, the parable of the host of the Great supper the parable of the Good Samaritan who provides the example of a neighbour. All these convey challenges which make the hearer look beyond the story themselves for its meaning. The unembarrassed affront to the norms which everything is expected to follow allows for the hearer's discovery of new set of norms which violate the old ones but lead to the kingdom.

The possible demarcation of v. 8 as the end of the parable is important, since it can be argued that, when the parable is read as an integral part of vs. 1-13, the sayings that follow the parable interpret it as being about the right use of money or possessions. According to Ireland (1989:300), these sayings are, however, effectively neutralised by separating vs. 1-8a from vs. 8b-13 if the latter verses are judged to be interpretive additions by Luke or the early church. For if they were not part of the original telling of the parable, they cannot be used for its interpretation (Ireland 1989:300). In this regard, DE Silva (1993:263) has explained that any effort to make the master's praise comprehensible to this world's logic is a denial of the

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his possession to the poor (Lk 19:8); and Barnabas, who donates to the community the proceeds from the sale of his property (Ac 12:12).

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essential scandal, of the parable in question, which jars the audience out of their everyday logical existence to foretaste an unconventional intelligibility. But such an explanation, which leaves the parable with no application, should be a last option, since the majority of parables find their instructive significance in their ability to offer culturally embedded similarities that resonated with their first-century audiences.

To conclude, one may agree with Landry and May (2000:288-289) that, among the few issues relating to this parable on which there is something resembling a consensus, one can agree with the majority of scholars, who say that the parable *as originally told by Jesus* probably ends with v. 8a rather than v. 7. Moreover, scholars seem to agree that the sayings that follow the parable in vs. 8b-13 are either only tangentially related to the parable, or they may represent misinterpretations of the parable told by Jesus by the author of the Gospel. In either case, interpretations that attempt to include vs. 8a-13 are relatively rare. But this study includes v. 9, because the focus thereof is on the theology of Luke and therefore on Luke's understanding of the parable, and not that of the historical Jesus when he originally pronounced the parable. If this was the focus of the study, an entirely different methodology would have to be followed.

2.4. Own Translation of Luke 16:1-9

Since this study undertook a close reading of Luke 16:1-9, it is necessary to translate it in order to have a clearer understanding thereof.

Table 1: Translation of the Greek text

Vs.	Greek Text	Translation

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2	καὶ φωνήσας αὐτὸν[30] εἰˆπεν αὐτῳˆ· τί τουˆτο ἀκούω περὶ σουˆ;[31] ἀπόδος τὸν λόγον[32] τηˆς οἰκονομίας σου, οὐ γὰρ δύνῃ ἔτι οἰκονομειˆν.	So he called him, said to him, what is this I hear about you? Hand over the account of your stewardship because you cannot be my steward.
3	εἰˆπεν δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῳˆ [33] ὁ οἰκονόμος· τί ποιήσω, ὅτι ὁ κύριος μου ἀφαιρειˆται τὴν οἰκονομίαν ἀπ' ἐμουˆ; σκάπτειν οὐκ ἰσχύω, [34] ἐπαιτειˆν αἰσχύνομαι.	And the steward said to himself, what shall I do since my master is taking the stewardship from me? To dig, I am not strong. To beg, I am ashamed
4	ἔγνων[35] τί ποιήσω, ἵνα ὅταν μετασταθωˆ ἐκ τηˆς οἰκονομίας δέξωνται με εἰς τοὺς οἴκους αὐτωˆν.	I know what to do, so that when I am dismissed from the management, people will welcome me into their houses.
5	καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος ἕνα ἕκαστον τωˆν χρεοφειλετωˆν [36] τουˆ κυρίου ἑαυτουˆ ἔλεγεν τῳˆ πρώτῳ·πόσον ὀφείλεις τῳˆ κυρίῳ μου;	And calling each of the master's debtors, he said to the first, how much do you owe my master?
6	ὁ δὲ εἰˆπεν ἑκατὸν βάτους[37] ἐλαίου. ὁ δὲ εἰˆπεν αὐτῳˆ· δέξαι σου τὰ γράμματα καὶ καθίσας ταχέως γράψον πεντήκοντα.	And he said, a hundred measures of oil. So he told him, take the contract and sit down quickly, and write fifty.
7	ἔπειτα ἑτέρῳ εἰˆπεν· σὺ δὲ πόσον ὀφείλεις; ὁ δὲ εἰˆπεν· ἑκατὸν κόρους[38] σίτου. λέγει αὐτῳˆ· δέξαι σου τὰ γράμματα καὶ γράψον ὀγδοήκοντα.	Then he said to the other, and you, how much do you owe? He also answered, a hundred measures of wheat. He said to him, take your contract and write eighty.
8	καὶ ἐπῄνεσεν ὁ κύριος τὸν οἰκονόμον τηˆς ἀδικίας ὅτι φρονίμως ἐποίησεν·[39] ὅτι οἱ υἱοὶ τουˆ αἰωˆνος τούτου φρονιμώτεροι ὑπὲρ τοὺς υἱοὺς τουˆ φωτὸς εἰς τὴν γενεὰν τὴν ἑαυτωˆν εἰσιν.	And the master commended the dishonest steward because he acted shrewdly. For the sons of this world with their own generation are shrewder than the sons of light.
9	Καὶ ἐγὼ ὑμιˆν λέγω, [40] ἑαυτοιˆς ποιήσατε φίλους ἐκ τουˆ μαμωναˆ τηˆς ἀδικίας, ἵνα ὅταν ἐκλίπῃ δέξωνται ὑμαˆς εἰς τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς.	And I say to you, make for yourself friends by unrighteousness, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal home.
1	Ἐλεγεν [24] δὲ καὶ [25] πρὸς τοὺς μαθητάς· ἄνθρωπος [26] τις ἠˆν πλούσιος ὃς εἰˆχεν οἰκονόμον[27], καὶ οὑˆτος διεβλήθη[28] αὐτῳˆ ὡς διασκορπίζων[29] τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτουˆ.	Then He also said to his disciples, there was a rich man who had a steward and accusation were brought to him that the steward was wasting his asset.

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[24] Literally, Ἔλεγεν δὲ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς μαθητάς is "Then he also said to his disciples", but other translations, like the NIV, have "Jesus told his disciples," the NRSV has "Then Jesus said to the disciples", and Fitzmyer (1985:1094) has "Then Jesus said to his disciples". Other translations only use the pronoun ("He also said to his disciples"), for example Plummer (1964:381); "He also said" (Nolland 1993:795); "He went on to say" (Hendriksen 1978:767); and "He continued to speak".

[25] Καὶ literally means "and" or "and then", "also" and "yet" (LN 1988:128). Both the NIV and NRSV did not translate it. It is the conjunction most frequently used of all Greek particles in the New Testament. It is used as a marker of connection to indicate a relation that is coordinate to connect clauses and sentences. It may also be translated as "likewise" (Danker 2000:494-495). Δὲ literally means "and", "and then", "but" and "so" (LN 1988:54). It is one of the most common Greek particles, used to connect one clause to another to express contrast or simple continuation (Danker 2000:213). From this analysis one can say έλεγεν δὲ καὶ, which literally means "Then he also said". This connotes continuity or change of tone, which the NIV did not capture but the NRSV did. From this analysis, I have chosen to translate Ἔλεγεν δὲ καὶ as "Then he also said" as the translation that captures the real Greek meaning and that the majority of scholars have suggested, as seen above. More on this will be discussed in Chapter 3, in the verse-by-verse discussion of the text.

[26] Ἄνθρωπός τις ἦν πλούσιος literally means "there was a rich man", as captured by both the NIV and NRSV. ἄνθρωπος literally means "Man", in human being or husband (LN 1988:20) or a person of either sex, and focuses on participation in the human race, human being, a member of the human race, a male person, man or adult male (Danker 2000:81). πλούσιος, also literally means rich or abundance (LN 1988:200). From this analysis one can see that both the NIV and NRSV translations translate it as "There was a rich man", are correct in their translation, especially in the choice of the rich. The same goes for my translation. When put in the plot of Luke, it appears as a common pattern of Luke in addressing people who are rich in his Gospel (Lk 15:11, 16:19)

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[27] Οἰκονόμον, although used here as direct object, the noun literally means manager of a household, administrator (LN 1988:173), or manager of a household or estate, public treasurer, or one who is entrusted with management in connection with transcendent matters, administrator (Danker 2000:698). Both the NIV and NRSV used "manager" and, in my translation, I used steward, because the steward is a superior person to the one mentioned in Luke 12:42. The steward here is a slave or freedman who is left in charge of other slaves, being responsible for the entire management of the estate (Plummer 1964:381).

[28] Διεβλήθη literally means accusation (LN 1988:58). It connotes making a complaint about a person, to bring charges, inform either justly or falsely (Danker 2000:226). Both the NIV and NRSV used "charges", while in my translation I preferred accusation and carried the Greek meaning. It probably implies accusing behind a person's back. The Vulgate here has *diffamatus est; Beza, delatus est;* Luther, *der ward beruchtiget*. It implies that the charges were false but the steward did not deny the charge (Plummer 1964:382).

[29] ˆῼς διασκορπίζων literally means waste, scatter, squander and disperse (Danker 2000:236; LN 1988:60, 267). The NIV uses wasting and the NRSV uses squandering, which means both carry the real Greek word. But I chose to go with the NIV. "Squander" is also used similarly in 15:13. This may reinforce the link between the second sections (Nolland 1993:797).

[30] Φωνήσας αὐτὸν, φωνήσας literally means call, cry out, name, invites and make a sound (LN 1988:260). The NIV uses "Called him", which I also did. The NRSV used "Summoned", and only the NIV carried the meaning of the Greek word, but grammatically, both are correct.

[31] Τί τοῦτο ἀκούω περὶ σοῦ; literally means "what is this I hear about you?" In the NIV – "what is this I hear about you", and in the NRSV "what is this that I hear about you?" The question can also be taken in three ways: "what? Do I hear this of you?"; "what is this that I hear of thee?"; and "why do I hear this of thee? (Plummer 1964:382). From this analysis, only the NIV carries the Greek meaning that I also did.

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[32] Ἀπόδος τὸν λόγον literally means hand over the account, speech, treatise, word, statement, reason, event, appearance and accusation (LN 1988:153). The NIV says "give an account", while the NRSV says "Give me an account". None uses the literal meaning of the Greek, and the NRSV personalises it by saying that "Give me", while I preferred to go with the literal meaning of the Greek.

[33] Εἶπεν δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῷ, literally means "and he said to himself". Both the NIV and NRSV did not make used of the conjunction "and"; they simply put it as "said to himself." I chose to go with the literal meaning of the Greek text. This is also used in Luke's other passages, and a clear example can be seen in the parable of the rich fool and Lazarus, and the parable of the prodigal son (12:17-19; 15:17-19), so like the steward's interior speech ("and [he] said to himself] is a significant turning point in the parable. Like the rich fool (12:17), he asks himself, "What will I do?" (Culpepper 1995:307). This will be discussed more in the course of the research.

[34] Σκάπτειν οὐκ ἰσχύω literally means "to dig or tilling ground, I am not strong enough" (LN 1988:222). Both the NIV and NRSV have it as I'm not strong enough to dig, which carries the same impression of the literal meaning of the Greek text. I preferred to go with "to dig, I am not strong". To dig was manual work (Culpepper 1995:307).

[35] Ἔγνων literally means "I know, learn, be familiar with, understand and acknowledge (LN 1988:51). To arrive at knowledge of someone or something, to acquire information through some means, learn, ascertain, find out, to grasp the significance or meaning of something, to have sexual intercourse with, have sex/marital relations with, to have come to the knowledge of, have come to know (Danker 2000:199-200). Both the NIV and NRSV made use of "I know", which I also made use of. The asyndeton and aorist express the suddenness of the idea (Plummer 1964:383). This also gives a view of the newly acquired knowledge as an achieved state. The time required for the removal is reflected here, as well as in when I am dismissed (Nolland 1993:798).

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[36] Χρεοφειλετῶν literally means "debtors", which both the NIV and NRSV and I made used of. But the identity of the debtors and the nature of leasing have generated scholars' attention, and this will be discussed in the course of this thesis.

[37] Βάτους, in Hebrew, means liquid measure, bath, jug, or loan (Danker 2000:171), or thorn bush, bath measure (LN 1988:44). The NIV uses gallons, the NRSV jug, and only the NRSV and I reflected the literal Greek meaning. This has raised questions in regard to the nature of the loan and in regard to the amount deducted from the debtors (Nolland 1993:178). More will be discussed later.

[38] Κόρους literally means measure (Danker 2000:560). The NIV says "container", the NRSV says "bushels", but the literal worth used in the Greek, which I also made use of, is "measure", so both translations did not carry the Greek meaning.

[39] Καὶ ἐπῄνεσεν ὁ κύριος τὸν οἰκονόμον τῆς ἀδικίας ὅτι φρονίμως ἐποίησεν, literally "And the master commended the dishonest manager because he acted shrewdly. The NIV says "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly." NRSV "And his master commended the dishonest manager because he acted shrewdly." Both carry the literal translation of the Greek text, but the NIV omits καὶ, and the NRSV also omits ὁ and replaces it with his. I prefer retaining the literal translation. The identity of the master and what the master praises are the challenge in this chapter, and one of the challenges in general. This implies application to what the master said earlier: "Balancing what the master has said to the steward" (Plummer 1964:385).

[40] Καὶ ἐγὼ ὑμῖν λέγω literally means "And I say, utter a word, say, tell, give expression to you" (Danker 2000:588). The NIV says "I tell you", and it also means call, speak, named and implied (LN 1988:151). The NIV uses "I tell you" and the NRSV "And I tell you"; both capture the literal meaning of the Greek text.

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2.5. **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the demarcation of the text (2.3) and its relationship with both the immediate and the broader literary context (2.2) were considered, revealing that, while the parable ends in an unexpected way, both the immediate and the broader literary context thereof provide evidence that the parable should be understood as teaching the right use of possessions. A translation of Luke 16:1-9 was also given (2.4). The inclusion of v. 9 as one will observe in the next chapter. is suggested on the grounds that this study did not focus on the historical Jesus or on what Jesus said and what he did not say. Rather, it focuses on the Lukan Jesus and that Luke might have added some things to what Jesus said in order to address some issues bothering his community.

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Chapter 3

A Social-Scientific Reading of Luke 16:1-9

3.1.Introduction

In this chapter, a social-scientific reading of Luke 16:1-9 is undertaken by identifying the social values embedded in the text in question. The reason for this is that, in order to understand the parable of the shrewd steward, it is necessary to consider the social values of the world it originated in, since the meaning of the parable in question arises in the interaction between the narrated elements and the cultural anthropology that the parable deliberately suggests (Kloppenborg 1989:486-487). In approaching the evaluation of the parable from this perspective, the intention was to build on the work of Herzog, Combrink and Scott, who all used a similar approach in interpreting the parable in question. Though reference will be made to the work of other scholars either because of the methods they have used to interpret the parable or for their role in the field of social science. The social-scientific reading of the text in this research is, however, primarily undertaken in line with the work of Combrink, Herzog and Scott.

3.2.The social context of Luke 16:1-9

It is important to take note of the social context a text is created in, since, according to Elliott (1993:10):

> … New Testament writings … are hardly devoid of social detail. [They] regularly refer to social relation (Jews/Greeks, male/female, slave/free, and so on), social groups and organisations (Pharisees, Sadducees, disciples, the twelve, the Herodian court, Pauline and Petrine circles), social institutions and events (taxation, census, temple and sacrificial system, family and kingship lineages and such), political rule (Augustus, Tiberius, Herod, governors, chief priests, and others), and patterns and codes of social behaviour (Torah observation, purity codes, honour, and shame codes, familial and friendship relations, patron-client codes, and much more)…

In the light of the above, one may agree with Neyrey and Stewart (2008:xxii) that "words take their meaning from a social system, not from a lexicon". For example, our 21st-century English dictionaries give the contemporary meaning of words such as "father", "mother" and

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"household", but cannot tell us the meaning of these concepts in the first-century culture. This is also not the purpose of contemporary dictionaries. The social world, or the social system of the first century in which the text in question was produced, needs to be examined in order to provide an appropriate cultural and social background against which the ancient texts can be read on their own terms. For example, the Lukan Gospel begins with a narrative about Jesus (Lk 1-3), which situates its narrative within a specific social matrix involving not only Jesus' family, but also the world in which they lived and the events that took place in it. These references reveal the context of the text. The patterns of behaviour they describe likewise constitute the social context (the environment involving a plurality of persons and groups), which is shaped by economic and societal conditions, structures and processes. In their language, content, structure, strategies and meaning, these texts presuppose, encode and communicate information about the systems in which they were produced and to which they were a response (Elliott 1993:9-10).

In the treatment of the text in question the intention is to build on the work of Combrink, Herzog and Scott, as well as those who have made their mark in the field of social-science, or have applied a similar method in interpreting the text (like e.g. Kloppenborg). The social system presumed by the text, as it is described by Combrink (1996:295-299) in his social-scientific study of the text in question, will also be specifically studied. This study will build on that of Combrink, who only focuses on honour as a pivotal value. The elements of Luke's social system that will be discussed here are the culture of honour and shame, the patron-client relationship and benefaction, hospitality in the ancient Mediterranean world, and the economic world of the first century. The inclusion of benefaction and hospitality are suggested by Kloppenborg (1989:491) in that the act of reducing the size of debts by the steward is an act of benefaction. In the moral and political economy of antiquity, this act imposed an obligation on the recipients and made the steward a patron of his master's debtors. And, in view of this, the expectation was that he might be received into their households, which suggests that hospitality, which was valued in the world of the steward, also needs to be considered. There may be more

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elements that constitute the social system behind the text, but these three were chosen because they are applicable to the text in question.[41]

3.2.1. A culture of honour and shame

According to Moxnes (1996:19), the concepts of honour and shame exist in almost all cultures. However, in many contemporary Western societies, these terms play a minor role as social values. Without doubt, many people today regard "honour" as an old-fashioned word, while they normally associate the term "shame" with the most private aspects of their lives. Moxnes (1996:19) says that, in both past and present Mediterranean societies, however, honour and shame played an important role in public life. Plevnik (2000:106) describes honour and shame as "core values[42] in the Mediterranean world in general and in the Bible as well". As a pivotal value in the ancient Mediterranean world, honour stood for and determined a person's rightful place in society. The place of honour was marked off by boundaries consisting of power, sexual status, and position on the social ladder.

Honour had to do with the value people had in their own eyes and in the estimation of others in their social group (Malina 2001:52; Neyrey 2008:88).[43] Honour is thus not honour unless it is publicly claimed, displayed, and acknowledged – in other words, honour is fundamentally the public recognition of one's social standing.

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[41] Baergen (2006:27) has suggested that the parable must also be read within the context of ancient slavery.

[42] The word "value" describes some general quality and direction of life that human beings are expected to embody in their behaviour. A value is a general, normative orientation of action in a social system (Malina and Pilch, 2000:xv).

[43] Downing (2007:884) agrees with the latter authors and adds that, even in the contemporary Mediterranean world, honour is still regarded as a pivotal value that expresses one's public standing.

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Honour operates in two ways, one's basic honour – usually termed "ascribed honour", is honour inherited from one's family at birth. Each child takes on the general honour status that the family possesses in the eyes of the larger group, and therefore ascribed honour flows directly from family membership and is not based on something the individual has done. In contrast, honour conferred on the basis of virtuous deeds is called "acquired honour". This is a kind of honour that one had to work for by way of a struggle for recognition, and this type of honour may be either gained or lost (Moxnes 1996:20).

Honour was displayed by the clothing worn in public, which also signalled status and wealth (Neyrey 2008:88-89). The story of the prodigal son serves as a clear example of this, where the son's honour was restored by the clothing that his father offered him upon his return: "Bring the best robe… and put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet" (Lk 15:22) (Neyrey 2008:89). "Luke knows that the elites are dressed in "fine linen and purple" (Lk 16:19) and that people "who wear soft and are gorgeously apparelled" live at the king's court (Lk 7:25). This is shown in the impression Herod made when he put on his royal robe to take his seat on his throne (Ac 12:21)" (Neyrey 2008:89)

Besides through clothing, the elite claimed honour through the manner in which they dined. Luke 20:46 indicates that there were places reserved for distinguished guests, and the advice on table manners in Luke 14:8-10 assumed that honour, rather than food, drink and dinner conversation, were the diners' and the hearers' overriding concern (Downing 2007:884) If honour is symbolised by family and wealth, especially by land, loss of honour can be symbolised by loss of family and wealth. The ancients distinguished between the undeserving poor, whom one should help, and those who deserved their predicament. This explains the distinction made between those who suffer "misfortune" and those who are poor because of their own fault (Neyrey 2008:89-90). Although honour may be individually acquired, it is normally attached to social groups, especially to families. All members of a certain clan, tribe, or family thus share in its collective worth and respect (Downing 2007:884).

In the ancient world one's honour was also related to one's gender, which, according to Moxnes (1996:21), generally reflected the power structures in ancient Mediterranean society. And since men held the dominant public positions, the male perspective also dominated the public discourse on honour and shame. Men were set on proving and defending their masculinity. In

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order to earn his honour, a man had to be able to defend the chastity of women under his dominance and protection. Should women lose their chastity, it implied that the shame was for the family as a whole (Moxnes 1996:21). Honour not only could be earned, but also could be lost. One may also gain honour at the expense of others' honour, for example (Downing 2007:884). According to Moxnes (1996:20), in the Mediterranean world, the interaction between people was always characterised by competition with others for recognition. Everyone therefore had to be alert to defend either their individual or their family honour. This kind of interaction often took the form of a challenge and riposte, most often verbally, but also with symbolic gestures and even with the use of physical force. Traditionally there were rules for such exchanges. Moxnes (1996:20) says a proper challenge took place among people who were equals or almost equal in honour. A challenge always implied recognition of the honour of the other person. Hence, to challenge without honour brought shame and humiliation to the challenger. The winner was always seen as somebody who had defended his honour, while the loser, on the other hand, experienced shame, since his standing in the community was damaged and downgraded (Moxnes 1996:21).

As was suggested above, women were potential sources of shame. However, in this sense, according to Moxnes (1996:21), shame for many had a positive side in Mediterranean culture, as it was related to modesty, shyness or deference. These were regarded as virtues – often construed as feminine virtues – that enabled a woman to preserve her chastity as well as her obedience to the male head of her family. Downing (2007:884) says women were thus seen as vulnerable, liable to forfeit their men's honour by their own shameful acts.

In another sense, shame was simply being socially sensitive and was thus applied to both men and women. So to be shameless was, for example, to lack concern for one's honour and to be insensitive to the opinions of others (Moxnes 1996:21-22). From this discussion it is clear that honour and shame were indeed a valued system of life for communication and culture in the ancient world.

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3.2.2. Patron-client relationship and benefaction

Evidence from the first-century period abundantly attests the existence of a Roman social institution known as *clientele* or, in modern terms, patronage.[44] This important and pervasive form of dependency relations, involving the reciprocal exchange of goods and services between socially superior patrons and their socially inferior clients, shaped both the public and private sectors of ancient life, as well as the political and religious symbolisation of power and dependency (Elliott 1996:144).

A patron-client relationship was a social, institutional arrangement by means of which economic, political or religious institutional relationships were outfitted with the overarching quality of kingship.[45] A patron is like a father, and clients are like loving and grateful children,

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[44] The term patronage as used in the first century, according to Simmons (2008:275), referred to the nearly universal ordering of social relationship based on the exchange of wealth and influence. This informal system of social stratification had patron-client relationships at its core. The patron, or *patronus*, possessed a surplus of financial and political capital and thus was in a good position to meet the request of the one in need, the client. In response to receiving *beneficia* ("favours" or "services"), the social expectation of the day required the client to repay the patron in kind, if possible, for "only the wise man knows how to return a favour". If the client was unable to respond in kind, then he/she was to publicly express his or her gratitude to the patron and seek other ways to repay the social debt. The client's obligation to the patron could be relieved through a number of ways. For example, the client might make cash instalments, provide various services, lend political support, include the patron in his or her will, or simply sing the praises of the patron at every opportunity (Simmons 2008:275).

[45] The word "Patron" derives from the Greek and Latin word for "Father", and when used for one who is not someone's biological father the title refers to both the role and status of a patron. God is called "father" relative to Israel as a whole (Deut. 32:6) and to the Davidic King (2 Sam. 7:14). Elisha addressed Elijah as "Father" (2 Kg. 2:12), as does Joash for Elisha (2 Kg. 6:21; 13:14). Similarly, Naaman the Syrian is called "father" by his servants (2 Kg 5:13). This future king of Isaiah (9:6) is called "everlasting father", that is, abiding patron; similarly, Eliakim:

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no matter what their age. Patronage relations permeated the whole of ancient Mediterranean society (Malina 2000b:151-153). Batten (2008:47) agrees with Malina by stating that patronage was a ubiquitous social framework in the ancient Mediterranean basin. Patrons, on the one hand, were people with power who could provide goods and services not available to their clients. In return, clients provided loyalty and honour to patrons. Social inequality characterised these patronal relationships, and exploitation was a common feature of such relationships. Even though the language of friendship was used to convey patronage, a number of Greek and Roman authors pointed out that true friendship involved frank speech between the parties. Patronage prevented such frank speech because the clients were indebted to the patron and thus could not risk terminating the relationship. From the client's point of view, favouritism was the main quality of such relationships. The patron had a much higher status and greater power and resources. The patrons provided their favours and help in exchange for items of a qualitatively different sort: material for immaterial, goods for honour and praise, force for status support, and the like (Malina 2000b:153).

It is clear from the discussion above that the principle of reciprocity lies at the centre of the patron-client system. Speckman (2007:157) has stated that, patrons and clients needed each other and benefited mutually from this relationship. By this kind of exchange of services and influence, mutual interests were served, beginning with the upper class of the society and continuing on down the chain of relationships to the level of slaves. The rules guiding this relationship were part and parcel of the social fabric of the day. The system was inherently hierarchical, involving parties that were unequal in power and wealth. The bond between the

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"and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah". The God of Israel was the central and focal symbol of Israel's traditional political religion, duly worshipped in Jerusalem's temple. By calling God "Father", Jesus introduced the Kingship title typical of patron-client behaviour. God the father is nothing other than God the Patron. The Kingdom of heaven proclaimed by Jesus was God patronage and the clientele bound up in it (Mt. 4:17, 23; 10:7; Mk. 1:15). Mathew's frequent use of the title for God the Patron signifies a "Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16). John, on the other hand, prefers simply "the Father" (Jn. 1:14). The tradition recalled Jesus' Aramaic usage for the divine patron, "Abba", meaning either "The Father," or "Oh, Father" (never "daddy") (Malina 2000b:151-152).

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patron and the client was that of dependency, with the client dependent on the good graces of the patron. As the direct beneficiary of the gods, the emperor was considered the patron[46] of all humanity, which made him the prime benefactor. Wealthy patrons also enjoyed surrounding themselves with philosophers, artists and writers. Such clients added to the prestige of the patrons, for they were a reflection of his or her culture and good taste (Simmons 2008: 275-276, 278, 282). In this kind of relation, the client could also afford to protest. His socio-economic status was different from that of a beggar. The client was aware that while he received something from the patron, the patron also gained by having him or her as client. Hence he could afford to rebuke the patron. After all, in accepting a client, the patron wanted to increase his honour in society and this make the relationship a mutual one (Speckman 2007:158-159)

The social institution of patronage was practised in the days of Jesus, as is evident in Luke 7:2-5, which relates the story of a centurion who had a slave who was dear to him. The slave, however, was sick and at the point of death. When the centurion heard of Jesus, he sent word to the elders of the Jews to ask him to come and heal his slave. And when they came to Jesus, they asked him earnestly, saying “he is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our

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[46] The most powerful patrons on a local level were the Romans governors, proconsuls and client kings. These officials assumed the role of brokers or mediators for the imperial patron. For this reason, the aristocracy indigenous to any particular region viewed the Roman governors as their patrons. They understand that all imperial benefits came by way of the governors, for the latter conveyed the granting of citizenship, confirmation to local offices, the endorsement of building contracts, and the conferral of honorific titles. Consequently, honouring Roman governors as sub-patrons of the emperor afforded access to Caesar, enhanced a local aristocracy’s prestige in the empire, and garnered real material benefits for the them, their families, and the subjects they governed. As client kings, the Herods lavished benefits upon the Caesars. They not only named cities and lakes in honour of the emperor, they even built entire cities for the emperor, complete with temples dedicated to the gods of the first-century Pantheon. All of these benefits were simply an expression of the most critical benefits that they would afford: complete loyalty and military support (Simmons 2008:282).

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nation, and he built us our synagogue". This gives a clear picture of the relationship that existed between a patron and clients. In this text, the centurion was the patron who played his role in terms of assisting the Jews, who in this context were the clients. Jesus, on the other hand, can be understood here to be a patron to the centurion, who came to him seeking assistance. By taking up the role of proclaiming the kingdom as recorded in Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15, Jesus presents himself as a broker or middleman of God's patronage. To this end he seeks other brokers to assist him in the task and grants them similar authority. A mediator or a broker was someone who gives access to a patron and is applied to Jesus in 1 Timothy 2:5 (Malina 2000b:154).

The elders of the Jews in Luke 7:2-5 function as brokers by acting as a go-between between Jesus and the centurion. This system was pervasive in the early church. According to Simmons (2008:289), "[t]he early church was birthed within the context of patron-client relationships and could in no way escape its influence. Indeed, there is evidence that wealthy patronesses, such as Lydia (Ac 16:14), John Mark's mother (Ac 12:12) and Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), were essential in establishing the churches". Paul's counsel to the Ephesian elders, that it is more blessed to give than to receive, was, however, a stringent critique of patron-client relations (Ac 20:35).

3.2.3. Benefaction and patronage

Benefaction is also a key social system of the people where the text of Luke originated. It was understood that the elite, who had the financial resources and the honour of the municipal office, were expected to contribute from their own resources for the benefit of the community. The community, on the other, was expected to show its gratitude in return by erecting statues or by giving honorary citizenship, golden crowns, and seats of honour at the theatre, free meals in the town and immunity from taxation, or by giving thanks and praise to the benefactor's good character and generosity. This relationship between the benefactor and the beneficiaries was so enshrined in first-century society that its influence regularly appears in the pages of the New Testament, especially in Luke-Acts and the letter of Paul (Stambaugh and Balch 1986:75).

This fact is clear in view of Jesus referring in Luke 22:25 to the way in which those in a position of authority sought the honour that came with the tittle *euergetism* ("benefactor"). Words referring to worship are used for the major responsibilities in the faith of Christians (Phil. 2:17,

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25-30). Others refer to the provision of repetitions at dramatic festivals, which were used for the way in which God supplies spiritual gifs to believers (Gal. 3:5; Phil. 1:19; 1 Pt 4:11) and bodily needs to the poor (2 Cor. 9:9-10)[47] (Stambaugh and Balch, 1986:75).

Batten (2008:47), who views benefaction as similar to patronage, but also different from it, explains that benefaction has a clear lack of self-interest on the part of the provider. Whereas the patron sought clients and an increased honour rating, the benefactor gave in order to help people without consideration of the honour that it would bring in mind. A benefactor, moreover, was not necessarily superior to those to whom he/she gave benefactions, and gave primarily to help the community and not only specific clients[48]. There are, however, a number of similarities between benefaction and patronage. The language of friendship common to patronage language is, for example, also used of benefactors, as is the language of fatherhood, which is especially characteristic of such individuals.

3.2.4. Hospitality in the ancient Mediterranean world

Just like other social systems already discussed, the practice of receiving a guest or a stranger graciously was very common throughout the period in which the Old and the New Testament were composed (Koenig 1992:299). This played an important role in both tribal and domestic life. Existence in the desert made it a necessity, and among the nomads it become a highly esteemed virtue. Through hospitality, foreigners or weary travellers found rest, food and shelter, and asylum. This custom was supported by the thought that the host himself might one day be a guest (Funderburk 2009:229-230). As a process of receiving outsiders and changing them from strangers to guests, this value served as a means for attaining and preserving honour.

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[47] Kim (1993:386) has stated that, to find out if there is any contemporary parallel to Luke's concept of almsgiving based on stewardship in his time, one needs to compare Luke’s notion with the benefaction systems prevalent in the first-century society at the time.

[48] Speckman (2007:159) emphasises this fact thus, “Benefaction was well established in Greek times and it was continued during the early centuries of the Roman Empire. It was a method of providing, not for individuals but for the city.”

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In the world of the Bible, hospitality was not meant mainly for the entertainment of friends and family members, but rather for dealing with strangers (Malina 2000a:115). Arterbury (2007:901) states that, by extending hospitality to a traveller, the host generally committed himself or herself to provide the guest with provisions and protection while the guest remained in the region. And, within this context, guest and host often forged long-term, reciprocal relationships, which are commonly referred to as guest-friendship. Hospitality meant receiving strangers into one's care, one's intimate in-group, and shielding the stranger with one's honour. It was the responsibility of the host to look after the needs of the guest, even to the point of defending the guest's honour with his or her own life. Unlike today, hotels were not available in the ancient world. Places for travellers were all of dubious moral quality. Regarding physical amenities, these inns were geared more for the maintenance of donkeys and camels than the people themselves (Malina, 1993:57).

Since strangers were to be treated well either physically or socially, their reception, according to Malina (2000a:115-117), occurred in three stages:

(1) Strangers had to be tested. Strangers posed a threat to any community, since they could potentially be hostile. Hence they had to be checked to discern how they might fit in and whether they would subscribe to the community's norms.

(2) The strangers took on the role of guest. Since transient strangers lacked customary or legal standing within the visited community, it was imperative that they find a patron, a host. The rules required that the guest refrain from insulting the host (e.g. refusing what was offered and usurping the role of the host).

(3) The guest never left the host with the same status he had upon arrival, for the stranger-guest would leave the host as either friend or enemy. If he or she left as a friend, the guest would spread the praises of the host (1 Thess. 1:9 Phil. 4:15). If as enemy, the one aggrieved would

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have to get satisfaction (3 Jn.). According to Koenig (1992:300),[49] as in the Old Testament,[50] the Synoptic Gospel writers present the ministry of Jesus in regard to the theme of hospitality in two ways. First, Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom is frequently symbolised by images of food and drink, especially at festive meals. Thus the kingdom is compared to a great banquet (Mt. 8:11; 22:1-14; Lk 14:16-24) and Jesus ends his ministry with a ceremonial meal, at which words about eating and drinking in the kingdom are spoken (Mk. 14:17-25). Secondly, the synoptic record of Jesus's behaviour shows that he intended to live in accordance with the coming feast of the Kingdom (Koenig 1992:300).

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[49] This is exemplified in a dominical saying about how Jesus' contemporaries perceived him. John, he complained, came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, he has a demon; the son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, hold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Koenig 1992:300).

[50] In the Old Testament, while there is no specific word for "hospitality" in the Hebrew, many stories reflect this practice. A definitive account of the custom is given in the story of Abraham's entertainment of three strangers who turned out to be angels. He hastened from his tent door to welcome them, washed their feet, provided a sumptuous meal of veal, milk, curds, and fresh baked bread in the shade of a tree, and stood attentively while they ate. That night in the city of Sodom, Lot entertained two of the same angelic guests (Gen 19:1-8). Of similar interest is the story of the courtship of Rebekah. When Abraham's servant and attendants arrived at the home of Bethuel in search of a wife for Isaac, Rebekah and her brother Laban cordially received them into their father's house. There they were entertained lavishly while they, in turn, adorned Rebekah with costly jewellery (Gen 24:11-61). Nomadic hospitality was preserved by the settled Israelites in Canaan. David made Saul's grandson a permanent guest at his royal table (2 Sam 9:7). Solomon's daily dinners were astounding, not to mention his banquets for royal guests like the queen of Sheba (1 Kg 4:22-23; 10:4-5). Nehemiah, governor of Jerusalem, daily fed at his table 150 Jews plus numerous aliens (Neh 5:17-18). Excesses in hospitality asylum are seen in the instances of Lot (Gen 19:1-8) and of the old man at Gibeah (Jdg. 19:1-24) (Funderburk 2009:130).

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In Luke, special attention is given to this theme of hospitality. Koenig (1992:301) says it is only in the Gospel of Luke that we have the parables of the Good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the rich man and Lazarus, the story of Zaccheus, and the Emmaus narrative, according to which two disciples come to recognise the risen Jesus in the breaking of bread (Lk. 24:35). Acts, on the other hand, may be read as a collection of guest and host stories depicting missionary ventures that originated in circles associated with the earliest churches. Luke's special concern is to show how itinerant and residential believers can support one another in the worldwide mission of the church (Koenig 1992:301). In view of this, it is very important to realise that early Christian exhortations for hospitality were aimed at sedentary Christians, directing them to receive traveling fellow Christians and to admit them into the local in-group (Malina 1993:58).

In the general epistles, Koenig (1992:301) says there are a number of references to images of hospitality that occur frequently. James 2:1-7 charges the recipients of his epistle not to humiliate poor people by assigning them inferior places in the public assemblies of the church. In 1 Peter 1:1; 2:4-10 and 4:9, Peter addresses his readers as aliens and exiles who were once "no people" but are now a chosen race built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. As such, they are to practise hospitality without complaint.

From the discussion one could say with certainty that hospitality in the ancient world was an important social value that was held in high esteem. It is also important to note that the system of hospitality was not selective. Strangers and friends, sinners and tax collectors were welcome. The Synoptic Gospel itself, as observed earlier, gives instances of table fellowship involving Jesus that seem to be paradigmatic for meals that were repeated on a regular basis: the meal with tax collectors and sinners hosted by Levi, a tax collector whom Jesus had called to follow him (Mt 9:9-13; Mk 2:14-17; Lk 5:27-32), and the final meal with his disciples eaten in celebration of the Passover the night he was arrested (Mt 26:19-30; Mk 14:16-31; Lk 22:13-38). With regard to the first, Jesus is depicted as someone who welcomes sinners and eats with them (Lk 15:2), implying that he did it repeatedly (Mt, 11:19; Lk, 7:34). With regard to the meal, Jesus is said to have instructed his followers to re-enact his final supper with them as a meal observed in remembrance of him (1 Cor. 11:24; Lk 22:19) (Powell, 2013:926). Early Christian missionaries also routinely depended upon hospitable hosts as they spread their message. Hospitality helped in bridging the cultural gap between Jesus and Gentiles. This can

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be clearly seen when Cornelius, a Roman centurion, converts to Christianity in Acts 10:1-48 (Arterbury 2007:901).

In the light of the discussion above, understanding hospitality may help one realize why the steward was eager to gain the favour of others so that he would be welcomed by them when he was finally kicked out of his master's household on the grounds of mismanagement of the master's resources.

3.2.5. The socio-economic situation of the world of the first century

In order to understand the role of the steward it is also necessary to take a brief look at the economic system of the ancient world in which the text under consideration was produced. Oakman (1996:126), who views the economy as commonly defined today as the allocation of scarce resources that preoccupies twentieth-century people in Western society, has stated that the modern economic system, with its networks of free markets, transportation, facilities, commercial institutions, banks,[51] monetary systems and policies, industrial and corporate organisations, gross national products, salaries and wages, is a social system all to itself, able to dominate other social institutions. Oakman (1996:126) says this experience of the modern world, however, serves as a stumbling block for thinking about ancient economic life and investigating its manifestations within the biblical writings.

According to Stambaugh and Balch (1986:63), the cultures of the classical world were based on a tradition that was older than money. Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews all looked back to a time when wealth and money were measured in terms of land or flocks, and power was measured in terms of family allegiance. Although money became important in the New Testament time, the basic social fabric of these civilizations was woven from the familiar fibre

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[51] Banking operations were often a function of social relations. Among the upper classes, as occasions arose when an individual needed money he borrowed it from friends; on other occasions, he lent to friends who needed it. Members of the upper classes also often were asked for loans by their dependants and clients as part of the reciprocal relationship between them (Stambaugh and Balch 1986:72).

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of personal contacts, favours done, and returns owed. Malina (2001:85) states that the basic human environment into which first-century Mediterranean persons (Jews, Romans, Greeks, or otherwise) were born was composed predominantly of agriculture and fishing villages socially tied to preindustrial cities. The preindustrial city in question usually served as the administrative, religious and market centre for the villages or towns under its symbolic power.[52] Longnecker (2010:20), who lists five types of pre-industrial societies, namely hunter-gatherer societies, simple horticultural, advanced horticultural, simple agrarian and advanced agrarian, explains that all these societies draw their primary resources from agricultural extraction.

From the above explanation, one can begin to get a notion of an economy that is different from today's. Kim (1998:252), who views the first-century period as characterised by extreme inequality, explains that the rich and the powerful were likely to become richer and mightier owing to their political power and social status, while the poor and helpless were vulnerable to forces that could render them poorer and more helpless, owing to their present disadvantages. This disparity between the poor and rich derived from the socio-economic structure of the ancient world, which was organised in favour of the rich so that the inequality in terms of the distribution of resources and political power was a serious challenge that resulted in the suffering of the poor. In view of this, one may be right to agree with Oakman (2008:63), who points out that the world in which Jesus lived was characterised by high levels of peasant[53]

[52] Jerusalem, Corinth, Ephesus and even Athens and Rome are examples of preindustrial cities of this time. The only difference between Rome and the other cities of the area was that it served as the central city, the imperial hub, to which all other cities were politically tied, while each city individually had a larger or smaller number of villages or towns under it. What resulted from this arrangement was a complex of inward-looking, closed systems that interfaced or touched upon each other: the village system, the city system, the empire system, and above all of these, the cosmic system (Malina 2001:85).

[53] Peasants worked the land as their ancestors had always done; their lives were spent in small villages where kinship and loyalty were primary values (Stambaugh and Balch 1986:91). There

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indebtedness. This debt put an obligation on peasants to operate in ways that benefited the elites of society. Longnecker (2010:23) further explained thus:

> …The majority of the non-elite were involved in manual labour of some kind, a form of the existence that was generally despised among the elite. Most labourers earned whatever living they could make from some form of agricultural extraction. Some labourers were fortunate to own their own small farms. Significance however were tenant farmers, who rented their farms from absentee landlords, or were slaves-ked with the responsibility of extracting the yields of the land for the landowners….

The labourers, the small merchants or craftsmen, were not much different from the villagers, since the life of the urban elite was normally quite closed off from that of the low-class urbanite. In the pre-industrial city there was no middle class at all. On the other hand, below the low-class urbanite stood the marginal group of beggars and slaves (Malina 2001:86). Agreeing with Malina, Kim (1998:254) captures the social stratification of the ancient world well by stating that the top was occupied by the aristocracy of the Empire, which include the equestrians, senators and decurion (the former two classes constituted the upper strata of the Roman nobility, while the latter constituted the lower strata). These local levels of aristocracy constituted less than one per cent of the whole population of the Roman Empire, but are known to have

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were peasant freeholders, that is, peasants who owned and farmed their own land, but had economic obligations that severely limited prospects for moving beyond a subsistence level. Their obligations were both internal and external to the family. The internal varied from person to person; people living in modern industrial societies require approximately 2 500 calories per day to meet their basic needs. Estimate for the Roman Palestine vary from 1 800 to 2 400 calories per person per day. The availability of calories from grain and produce in a peasant family in antiquity would have varied inversely to the number of mouths to feed. Externally, participation in weddings or other festivals and the requirements of cultic or religious obligations required yet another portion of the annual produce and could vary from place to place and year to year. Most agrarian societies have expropriated between 10 and 50 percent of the annual produce in taxes. Recent estimates for Roman Palestine, including the variety of both civil and religious taxes, put the figure there at 35 to 40 percent (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992:375-376).

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possessed a vast proportion of its total wealth, both in land and in other resources at that time.[54] Kim (1998:255) has added that, below the ruling elite were the merchants and traders, who took the next position in terms of economic affluence, because they could become rich out of the profits that came from their business. Along with these merchants and traders, the skilled workers and artisans also earned reasonable wages and, under ordinary conditions, did not seem to have had difficult lives. Apart from these top and middle classes of society, there were two lower classes: one was the tenant farmers and the unskilled workers, who had to earn their daily wages through various menial jobs that might be available on the open market, such as being burden-bearers, messengers, animal-drivers, and ditch-diggers, and the other were the slaves, who were owned by wealthy individuals or the state. Although, in view of their social status, the slaves were the lowest class of the contemporary society, they were provided with food and shelter by their owners and hence might have been better off than the unskilled workers, who had to depend upon employment, which was not always available. Moreover, there was a range of social conditions under which slaves might live. It is likely that these two low classes were regarded as the poor from the point of view of the upper class. And, apart from this extremely unbalanced social structure, natural phenomena also made the suffering of the poor more serious (Kim 1998:256).

In view of the social stratification of the first century, one might say that the first-century world was designed purposely for the good of the elite in the society, while the rest of society existed to enable the elite to continuously enjoy their life while they looked down on the poor.

The economic relations of the day further explain this. The aristocrats helped each other in mutually rewarding ways. They extended hospitality and gifts to friends visiting from other areas, and formed alliances with other important families in their area. The poorer relations and neighbours were sought for political support and for help with harvests and in feuds with rival aristocrats, and these poorer relations and neighbours in turn looked to them for physical protection and for loans or gifts in time of need (Stambaugh and Balch 1986:63). It is also clear from the Gospels that similar institutions governed the relationships in terms of classes in the

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first century. The parable of the husbandmen (Mt 21:33-41; Mk 12:1-9; Lk 20:9-16) illustrates the subordinate position of the tenants to the wealthy property owner. Luke has several stories (12:35-38; 14:12-24; 17:7-10) about the relationship that existed between the rich and the poor at meals. He also has a story of the persistent woman who prevailed on her patron for help. As observed above in regard to patron-client relationships, the only element governing these personal and social relationships was reciprocity. The patron favoured a client and expected honour or praise in return. The superiors gave food or money to the inferiors; "municipal patrons gave buildings and endowments to cities; princes donated aqueducts and temples to client kingdoms. But they all did so in the expectation of loyalty, of honour, of military support, not of monetary return" (Stambaugh and Balch 1986:63).

The elite of the preindustrial city consisted of individuals, same literate, who held positions in the political, political religious and political-socio-economic institutions of society. These elites, who were assisted by their slaves, operated as administrators and resided in the city. The New Testament, from where the text in question comes, has a number of examples (the Sadducees and Herodians belong to Jerusalem's elite). The members of the city's elite derived their status through birth; they belonged to the right families and thus enjoyed power and property. Their position was legitimated, for the most part, by the Old Testament writings. This is also clear for the priestly Sadducees, while the princely Herodians would get their legitimation from the sacred writings of the Romans (the Roman law), with the Roman prefect in the country to enforce it (Malina 2001:86-7).

With regard to the discussion carried out so far on the view of the economic system of the Mediterranean world of the first century and other social systems of the first century, one can agree with Malina (2001:105) that the world of the first century was a peasant society that was rural, along with the preindustrial surrounding villages over which the cities had influence. A large number of the population at that time lived in villages. For this majority of people, the perception of life was that resources were limited. This awareness lay behind the attitude considered important for an adequate human existence.

Malina (2001:105) says the basic need for security in an intimidating and susceptible world, prismed through the image of insufficient possessions, revealed the sources of power and effects, of wealth and faithfulness, at the boundaries of one's closed system, as well as among

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select members of one's peer group. Behaviour at this boundary, horizontally considered, entailed give-and-take responsibilities with one's equals. Malina (2001:105) adds that, vertically, such behaviour took the form of the patron-client system. Both colleague relationships and patron-client relationships involved shared obligations that might be called dyadic contracts.

It is clear from the discussion above that the socio-economic situation of the first century cannot be discussed in isolation from the social system of the time.

3.3. **Luke 16:1-9**

In this section, the parable of the shrewd steward will be read and analysed by using the insights of scholars who have used a social-scientific exegetical approach, supplemented by insights from those who followed different approaches.

3.3.1. "A certain man was rich who had a steward" (v. 1b)

The first character introduced in this parable is an unnamed rich man who had a steward. Scott (1989:260) has pointed out that all stories draw on a repertoire of social expectations, cultural conventions and so forth that make a narrative lifelike.[55] The first line of the parable draws from the social repertoire of the patron-client model (3.2.2), in which a rich man and a steward represent familiar values for a hearer. It casts the rich master[56] in a predetermined role: that of

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[55] Herzog (1994:239-240) and Combrink (1996:300) point out that the most common assumption regarding the scene in the parable is that it represents small-village life.

[56] For Schellenberg (2008:264) and Baergen (2006:27), the debate regarding the identity of the *kurios* at the conclusion of the parable in v. 8a has remained an issue that has not been resolved satisfactory. The master in v. 8 is often compared to the master in Luke 18:6, which clearly refers to Jesus. In Luke 18:6 there are, however, clear clues that suggest the change of subject, but these clues do not occur in Luke 16:1-8. According to DE Silva (1993:263), it would be strange if a man who has just been duped praises the one who duped him. Ireland (1989:300) has argued that the ὁ κύριος recorded in v. 8, refers to the Lord Jesus who commended the

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an absentee landlord whose steward manages his estate. As a landowner he might probably have resided in a preindustrial city, so that he employed an estate manager who had the right to rent property, make loans and liquidate debt on his behalf.

According to Nolland (1993:797), the master here need not be, as is often assumed, an absentee landlord making one of his infrequent visits to check up on his affairs. Resident landowners could also entrust their affairs to stewards and would also be more likely to receive such a "tip-off". If the landlord was resident on his estate, he might however have seen how things were going and how the steward was handling his affairs, so that he did not need a report from others. But, as shall be seen shortly, the fact that the rich man said he had heard rumours indicates that he was not present on the estate to see things for himself. While the nature and duration of the landlord's absence are not clear, what is clear is that he had delegated the responsibility for the management of his land to a steward.

It is the steward who is the central character in the parable, and it therefore is important to understand the function of stewards in the ancient economy. According to White (2009:609), in the Old Testament the English word "steward" can be used to render the Hebrew noun *soken*

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steward for his generosity and foresight. But, aside from the fact that the use of direct speech in v. 9 makes it improbable that ό κύριος in the preceding verse is to be identified as Jesus, this interpretation portrays Jesus condoning unethical behaviour, which alone is sufficient cause to consider additional interpretations. Schellenberg (2008:265) observes that rich characters in the Lukan narrative (labelled as πλούσιοι) would not support such benevolent behaviour. He therefore is of the opinion that the master (ό κύριος) in v. 8 cannot represent a master who is both wealthy and sympathetic toward the steward's compassionate scheme. Goodrich (2012:550-51), who has responded to the view by Schellenberg, states that he failed to acknowledge the implicit examples of benevolent rich men that can be identified in Luke-Acts. For example, in the parable of the prodigal son, which has similarities to Luke 16:1-9, there is an apparently wealthy father who is nothing if not charitable to his irresponsible son. Goodrich is therefore of the opinion that other Lukan parables do portray wealthy κύριοι as generously rewarding their faithful slaves. The master who is praised in v. 8 may thus be taken as referring to Jesus.

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(Is. 22:15), but more commonly translates as a Hebrew phrase involving a relative pronoun, preposition, and the noun *bayit* – "house". For example, Joseph's steward (Gen. 43:19) represents the Hebrew *ha is aser al bet yosep* ("the man who was upon the house of Joseph)". In the New Testament, the term is used to describe a steward, *epitropos*, which denotes "a guardian" or "a manager". Managers are likewise described in two of Jesus' parables (Lk 12:42-44, 16:1-2), with the latter passage being the focus of this research. The King James Version uses steward with some frequency to render two Greek nouns, *epitropos*, meaning "manager" or "foreman" (Mt. 20:8), and *oikonomos*, meaning "household manager", "administrator" (Lk 12:42).

In considering the New Testament context of the term "steward", Baergen (2006:28-29) states that the New Testament context is more helpful in providing information on how the term "steward" is to be understood. The term *oikonomos* occurs seven times outside of Luke 16 – once again in Luke (12:42), four times in the Pauline epistles (Rom 16:23; 1 Cor. 4:1, 2; Gal 4:1), once in Titus 1:7, and once in 1 Peter 4:10. What becomes apparent here is the relatively limited range of meaning that the word *oikonomos* permits. At times it clearly designates private slaves entrusted with particular authority and responsibility.[57] For Paul, the metaphoric function of the term becomes explicit in 1 Cor. 4:1, when Paul asks the Corinthian assembly to think of himself and presumably other leaders as the *oikonomia* of God's mysteries and, in 1 Cor. 9:17, he defines himself as having an *oikonomia* forced upon him. That said, Paul does not lose sight of the material reality of the term. If he is an *okonomos* in 1 Cor. 4:1, he also is answerable to a master (1 Cor. 4:2, 4), and if he assumes an *oikonomia* (1 Cor. 9:17), he does so as a slave to all (1 Cor. 9:19).

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[57] Luke 12:42-44, for instance, reads: Who then is the faithful and shrewd oikonomos whom the master will place over his household slaves (therapeas) to give their portion at the proper time? Happy is that slave (doulos) whom his master, having come, found so doing. Truly I say to you, he will place him over all his possessions. The oikonomos of v. 42 is evidently the fortunate slave of vs. 43-44. His servile status, however, does not impede his upward mobility within his master's household, or, for that matter, his suitability as an implicit ideal for the Lukan disciples.

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The term may also refer to the manager of a private urban household or rural estate.[58] Luke 12 describes the most basic duties of a private *oikonomos* as being responsible for overseeing the owner's workforce in his absence, and the distribution of duties. These were normally paid in the form of a commission or a fee on the transaction arranged for his landlord. Jones (2009:379) defines a steward in the first-century world as one who manages the affairs of a large household. Rich landowners employed these estate managers, often a slave[59] born in the household who

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[58] The New Testament also attests to two additional uses of the term. In Romans 16:23 it is used of a public official, Erastus, the *oikonomia* of the city (*oikonomia tes poleos*). Whether Erastus should be considered a municipal slave, or a Roman official whose status remains unclear (as do the duties assigned him), is not known. It is clear that *oikonomomoi* were evidently not always privately owned and/or employed. As already seen in the Pauline epistles, the steward can also be used in a figurative manner. Titus 1:7, for instance, calls the *episkopos* the *oikonomos* of God, and 1 Peter 4:10 challenges the entire community to be good *oikonomoi* in the management of God's gifts. Baergen (2006:29) further states that the figurative use of the term *oikonomos* in the New Testament is confirmed by its wider first-century setting. From the 4th and 3rd century BC, for example, Xenophon depicts the military general as a good *oikonomos* generating loyal obedience in his subordinates, delegating authority wisely, attracting effective allies, and guarding and leading by example. Lysias describes the good wife as an *oikonomos* of her husband's affairs, while Aristotle presents the creator as an *oikonomos* of pleasure. Likewise, in the imperial period, Epictetus suggests that the Lord of the cosmic mansion acts as an *oikonomos.* Even one who sponsors a symposium can be call an *oikonomos.* More often, however, the term refers to a public official. Asia Minor provides considerable epigraphic evidence for the role and status of the *oikonomos* of the city.

[59] It is also clear that, by the imperial period, there was evidence of private *oikonomoi* of freed status. Slaves functioned as administrators of the empire's grain supply. In the imperial period, whether explicitly or implicitly, private *oikonomoi* almost always appeared to be slaves. To connect this to the parable of the steward under consideration, Baergen (2006:29) concludes that the rich man's *oikonomos* might have been released outright, since he anticipates neither demotion, physical punishment nor sale, as a typical slave might have, but only a change in his

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had the right to rent property or give loans or liquidate debts in the name of the master to manage their estates (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992:373-374). Reflecting on the identity and role of a steward in the first century, Herzog (1994:243) agrees with Jones (2009:379) that a steward was an estate manager, a position of considerable authority and trust. The steward was the responsible agent to whom the absent master entrusted the management of his estate. This authority of a steward made his position more fiduciary in character than contractual. Herzog (1994:243) further explains that the steward was able to represent his master and act on his behalf, enter into contracts and, in general, attend to the legal matters assigned to him by his master. A steward could not be prosecuted for wrongdoing, but could be shamed or dismissed from his position. As an estate manager, stewards were paid agents who also had other ways to augment their income. For example, stewards belonged to the class of retainers who executed the will of the elites. A steward thus was one who was entrusted with the responsibility of the proper management of the belongings of another person or group and who was accountable to his owner.

It thus is clear that a steward, like the one mentioned in Luke 16, was highly placed in the household administration of the rich and powerful elite. It is also apparent that the master relied on the steward to manage his estate and to realise a profit large enough to support his lifestyle and to provide the resources needed to fund his competition with other elites. The steward therefore occupied a powerful, but at the same time vulnerable, position, seeing that he was always susceptible to backstabbing from disgruntled debtors or tenants. Herzog (1994:41), in agreeing with Baergen in stating that the steward was about to be dismissed, reveals that he is a retainer or freed man and not a slave, although retainers in the household of an elite were nearly as dependent as a slave, but without the security associated with slavery. A slave, after all, was property worth preserving.

The steward's contemplation of his future position after he was dismissed from his stewardship comprised begging and digging, referring to common activities of day labourers. The steward

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status in the household. The debtors mentioned in the parable, on the other hand, are the peasants who farm his lands or tend his orchards. They may be either tenants or freeholders who worked on the master's estates.

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did not contemplate a demotion in the household hierarchy of slaves, or even think of being sold to the mines or galley ships, since he was not a slave. Digging was the hardest work and was mostly done by the uneducated and the enslaved. For the steward to be dismissed from his stewardship, and to join the workforce as a labourer for day work, was to drop out of the retainer class into that of the expendables. According to Herzog (1994:242), the steward had nothing left to offer but his physical energy, and the former steward would have little chance of competing for better work with peasants who had worked all their lives. The competition for work was fierce due to an excess of child artisans, who had fallen into the class of the dispensable. Being used to regular meals, he would have to adapt to irregular meals interspersed with long periods of hunger. Herzog (1994:242) stated that, he would lose what little strength he had and would have become a beggar until, like Lazarus and thousands of others, he died from the complications of malnutrition and disease. His dismissal can thus be compared with a death sentence. If he lost his position, he would lose not just a stewardship, but his access to the household bureaucracy itself.

According to Baergen (2006:32), it nonetheless is not stated anywhere that the steward's master had actually dismissed him from his stewardship. The master only says that the man is no longer fit for the particular privilege of management (v. 2). How the rich man would deal with the steward beyond this demotion is not stated. Nor is it stated in the words of the steward himself. It is not clear if he is immune to the punishment or sale that typically faced an uncooperative slave; all that is mentioned is his fear of demotion in the form of hard labour and conspicuous dishonour that leads to his desire to win the favour of his master's clients. It may even be that the steward expected them to intercede with his angry master on his (steward) behalf. But the text does not state this.

3.3.2. "And the steward was accused to him as squandering his goods" (v. 1c)

Whether the master in the parable, as pointed out above, is an absentee landlord who only visits his estates on occasion, or a member of the local nobility who lives closer to his estate, perhaps in a nearby urban centre, he is clearly part of the elite class, since in the parable he is described as *plousios*, which is an indication of wealth and prestige (Herzog 1994:240). Being rich he

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would have had some economic and political influence (Combrink 1996:300).[60] That the steward's negligence or dishonesty was known publicly would thus result in the reputation of the master being damaged. There thus was a need for the master to take the necessary action to avoid further loss of his honour (3.2.1). He could, however, not go to the court, as this would have further damaged his honour (Combrink 1996:301). Only those of equal social standing could be challenged in a public setting like a court.

The Greek word used here for accused (*dieblethe*) is a morpheme of *diabolos* ("devil"). "Was accused" is generally used in a hostile sense, at times with the implication of slander (Scott 1989:262). An accusation did not in itself imply whether the charges were true or false, but the fact that the charge was taken seriously by both master and steward indicates that it was justified (Marshall 1978:617).[61] This confirms the previous negative impression of the rich man and highlights the steward's precarious position. DE Silva (1993:258) adds weight to this by stating that the steward comes on the scene already in a position of disadvantage. He has been accused to the rich man by some unnamed accusers.

The rich man is the steward's patron, who trained and invested in him. He appointed him in a role with the fiduciary responsibility of a client to a patron. It is the expectation of the rich man that the steward will take his honest graft, do his job, produce the expected profits, and keep the peasants under control. The steward thus has to balance his greed in order not to become noticeable in his consumption. One possible meaning of the verb *diaskorpizon,* which can be translated as "wasting", is "scattering" or "dispersing." The same verb appears in Luke 15:13,

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[60] In Luke, the rich are, however, not viewed in a positive light. DE Silva (1993:258), who compared the rich man with other occurrences of the rich in Luke, asserts that all those depicted as rich in Luke are, in one form or another, excluded from the redeemed community or disapproved, with the single exception of Zaccheus, whose salvation comes when he ceases to be notably *plousion*, giving away more than half of his possessions.

[61] According to Nolland (1993:797), the steward could have siphoned off funds for his own consumption from transactions made in the name of his master.

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where it is used to describe the prodigal son's life of conspicuous consumption. Thus the steward may have indulged in forms of status display and consumption unsuitable to his social standing. If he had been amassing too much and spending it in ways that caused a stir, he could have set himself up for his fall. To engage in this behaviour of squandering was to dishonour his master by taking advantage of his position and competing with the master, rather than acknowledging his own submissive and dependent position (Herzog 1994:251-252).

In fact, the steward can be seen as challenging the honour of the master by wasting his goods, and this would have shamed the master and challenged his social position and that of his family (Combrink 1996:301). Honour, which was measured in part by the degree of respect and loyalty shown a householder by his *oikos*, and in part by his reputation among his peers, as observed above, implies that the social standing of the rich man, rather than his money, is at stake. If the rumour about the steward's mismanagement had come from within, the master would have just punished the steward, but apparently the rumour had come from outside his household. This implies that it was not the steward himself who was on trial, but rather the master himself in the court of public opinion among his peers. It is the master who will be seen as the one who has failed to control and command the respect of his steward, and this would incur a grave social stigma (Kloppenborg 1989:489).

The steward is, however, also in a precarious situation. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:374) say that, "traditionally, Israelite law provides that an agent was expected to remit for any loss incurred by his master or employer for which he was responsible". But, in a situation of this nature, the master of the steward has only one option: to dismiss the steward. His punishment was, however, secondary, and the recovery of the master's honour was the central problem. So the only thing the master could do was to dismiss the steward and do so quickly, thereby freeing himself from being seen as somebody who had failed to control his steward (Kloppenborg 1989:489).

3.3.3. And calling he said to him, give an account of your stewardship for you are no longer able to be steward (v. 2)

According to Scott (1989:262), the means by which the rich man responded to the accusation laid against the steward aligned with that of the accusers, and he thus lived up to the social expectation of his time. The rich man's action toward the steward confirmed that the story

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reflected the world of the lower classes. There was no trial; instead the story jumps immediately to punishment. The steward had no opportunity to explain himself or the action of which he had been accused. He knows neither his accusers nor what their accusation is, except that he has supposedly squandered the master's property.

As stated above by Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:374), traditional Israelite law provided that an agent was expected to pay for any loss incurred by his employer for which he was responsible. Alternatively, the agent could be put in prison so that the funds could be extorted from his family.

If the unfaithfulness of the steward became known publicly, the agent would have been seen as damaging the reputation of the master, affecting his honour – as observed earlier. The plan worked out by the manager had to be enacted before word of his dismissal got back to the village (Nolland 1993:797).

In the parable, however, it is startling that the steward is simply dismissed. In the case of dismissal, it was effective as soon as the agent was informed of it, and from that time on, nothing the agent did was binding on the person who employed him.

The dismissal of the steward raises the question of what the manager would do to those whose debts he had managed on his behalf. Goodrich (2012:554) states that, in addition to expulsion from an estate, there were three courses of legal action that a landlord could take against his debtors, namely property confiscation or removal, imprisonment, and debt bondage.[62] The latter two naturally were used as a last option in cases where a debtor had no possessions to relinquish or sell. Many extant leasing contracts from early Roman Egypt contain declaration clauses indicating not only that an interest rate would be added to all late payments, but also that the landlord would have the right to take action against both the tenant's person and property should he continue to default. But, in addition to these courses of legal action, there was a fourth option, which could serve as a possible explanation for the master's commendation

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[62] Mathew 18:23-34; Mathew 5:25-26/Luke 12:58-59.

of the steward in Luke 16:8, namely the remission of rent as a means to enable and encourage debt repayment.[63] During the early empire, partial rent reduction for large-scale landowners in both the western and the eastern parts of the Mediterranean proved to be not only a sensible course of action to secure consistent and long-term profitability, but also a prudent strategy for obtaining debt repayment (Goodrich 2012:555). It thus can be said that the action of the master against the steward – of not asking him to pay anything but simply to free him from the work and urge him to give an account of his stewardship – was in line with what was obtainable in the ancient world in which the text was produced.

3.3.4. The steward said to himself, what shall I do because my master is separating the stewardship from me (v. 3)

Both Scott (1989:262) and Herzog (1994:240-241) stress the precarious position of the steward. His stewardship is to be taken away from him. Therefore, he says to himself (εἶπεν δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῷ), “What am I going to do?”(τί ποιήσω).

Nolland (1993:797) argues that there is no doubt the master intends the steward to be stripped at once of his authority to act. He has been asked to hand over to his master the documents

[63] Rent remission was somewhat customary in Roman farming. Ancient sources generally describe three circumstances in which lessees received reductions in rent. First, there were instances of statutory remission of rent. In these rare cases, the state granted a general remission of rent to an entire class of tenants without specific regard to their individual situations. Second, there were cases of obligatory contractual remission, where tenant farmers who had suffered catastrophic crop failure – often due to uncontrollable weather conditions –were unable to pay their rent in full. Such tenants, on a case-by-case basis, could claim from courts a contractual right to remission of all or part of their rent. Third, and significant for this research, there were cases of voluntary remission by the landlord. In these instances the landowner granted the tenant remission of rent of his own will, without any legal intervention. In cases of both obligatory and voluntary remission, the lease remained intact and, aside from the reduction or removal of the year’s rent, both the landlord and tenant had to fulfil their other contractual obligations (Goodrich 2012:554).

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relating to his conduct of the affairs of his stewardship. But since it will take time for the news of the steward's loss of his position to reach the master's debtors, there inevitably will be a period that would allow the plan that the steward made to be implemented. The time required for ejecting the steward from his position is reflected in the present tense – "was taken away". The steward knew that a defence of his actions would not persuade his master to reinstate him, and that if he was to save himself something needed to be done and done quickly (Kloppenborg 1989:490).

In ancient society, persons removed from their class and role were often left in a precarious position (Marshall 1978:618; Nolland 1993:798). The steward would have had nothing to fall back on, for he saw no future chance of employment as a steward. This can be seen clearly in his consideration of his options, which assumes that his name is to be blacklisted. Another similar job would not likely come his way. Begging and manual labour were the levels immediately above slavery on the social scale, and probably his only options.

DE Silva (1993:260) states that the phrase *en heauto* ("in/to himself"), combined with some verb of saying, thinking or realising, appears at significant junctures in three other Lukan parables, namely in the parable of the rich fool (Lk 12:17), the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:17), and that of the judge (Lk 18:4). The parable of the unforgiven Pharisees (Lk 18:17) uses the phrase with a verb of praying and is thus not identical to the emphasis in the other three parables. Taken together with other parables, this inward reflection suggests the significance of the moment of crisis and decision.[64] The steward realised that he was indeed in a serious situation and needed to do something to save himself. In view of the economic system of which he was a part, the steward would have been familiar with the backstabbing needed to

[64] According to DE Silva (1993:260) the four characters in Luke that are given these internal soliloquies are faced with a crisis, a situation that calls for immediate attention. The stakes vary from peace of mind to survival itself, but is the essential dynamic the same? The three realised the nature of their predicament and act positively and successfully. The rich fool, as the title usually given him suggests, reveals that he does not realise the significance of the moment and the sort of attention and redirection it demands, and dies disapproved by God.

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reach his present position. He could thus surmise that some nameless person had accused him in order to gain his privileged position. Given the master's frame of mind, he could see that it would be useless to protest his innocence. All that he could do was to confirm the master's hasty judgement. If he was to survive, he therefore had to develop a different strategy and employ different tactics.

To the steward, the question of whether he is innocent or guilty is not even a consideration. Guilty of what? Taking too large a cut? Failing to achieve usurious profit margins? Not covering his back as well as he usually does? To the steward, it is simply the realisation that his master knows the truth and that he had expected total obedience that determines his actions. His disobedience has brought judgement and he cannot save his position by offering a series of excuses (Herzog 1994:245).

3.3.5. To dig I am not strong enough; to beg I am ashamed (v. 3d)

Herzog (1994:41), Scott (1989:263) and Combrink (1996:301) state that, when the steward contemplated his future after he has been dismissed from his stewardship, he envisions a bleak alternative begging and digging, which were the common activities of day labourers. The steward does not contemplate a demotion in the household hierarchy of slaves, or even think of being sold to the mines or galley ships, because he is not a slave.

Presented with the reality of his immediate release, the steward takes stock of his own resources. He is indeed limited by his strength with regard to what kind of work he might seek out, and by his pride with respect to living off the charity of others. He recognises his limitations and that he does not have time to build up his stamina for digging and therefore settles decisively on a plan that does not rely on his strength (DE Silva 1993:261). He sees one way out, which represents a radical departure from the behaviour and principles a steward is expected to exhibit, and sets to work enacting it (Combrink 1996:301-302). He rejects any plan of action that will require him to depend only on himself and his strength. He refuses throwing himself into the system of almsgiving, depending on others' munificence without any contribution of his own. The plan he intends to carry out focuses on his relationship with others. But, most importantly, it helps reveal the real nature of the steward, which might have been the reason for him squandering the resources of his master (i.e. he only serves his own interests).

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3.3.6. I know what I will do … Take your bill and write eighty (vs. 4-7)[65]

In the phrase, ἔγνων τί ποιήσw, the aorist ἔγνων (literally, "I knew"; here, "I know") gives a picture of the newly acquired knowledge of the steward. The time required for his removal is reflected here, as well in "when I am removed". He appears to be complying with the master's demand that he return the account books of his stewardship, but his symbolic compliance depends on his feigned ignorance of the master's judgement. Instead, he plans to use his master's books to secure a future for himself. The steward recognises that his conduct has resulted in his demise, so he turns his attention to a new strategy. He intended to make his plans for building a relationship with others by trading material capital for relational debt.

The play upon *oikos* in the balanced phrases, "out of the stewardship" and "in their houses", derives its sense from the fact that the loss of the man's stewardship involved the loss of a roof over his head (Nolland 1993:798). The term *metastatho* ("when I am expelled") and *dexontai* ("they will receive me") may refer explicitly to the steward and to the debtors' homes. It may, however, also refer to judgement in a broader sense. The steward's impending exclusion is very real, and the image of being turned out is also closely related to the image of being cast out in other parables, such as that of the great banquet or the sheep and the goats. There is also the correlative of being welcomed or received into the community of the blessed. One can recall the wise investors of the talents who were command to enter into the joy of their master (DE Silva 1993:261).

So the threat of being turned out of his master's house, and the desperate hope of being welcomed into their homes, become the two coordinates of the steward's thought. His fixation

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[65] Verses. 4-7 in full read: "I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses. So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil', he replied. The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit quickly, and make it four hundred'. Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' 'A thousand bushels of wheat', he replied. He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred'" (NIV).

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upon these points enables him to execute an appropriate plan (DE Silva 1993:261). The disgraced steward decided to create his own patronal relationship (3.2.2) with his master's debtors by reducing their debts so that they, in turn, could reciprocate his benefaction by showing him hospitality (3.2.4). The manager has thus taken advantage of the time before he is removed from his position to make arrangements for his future. This may not represent a permanent solution to his needs, but it would deal with his immediate needs. The basis for his confidence lies in the reciprocity ethic that was so important in first-century culture. But would this plan succeed? According to Kloppenborg (1989:491) it would.

The phrase "people will welcome me into their houses" (Lk 16:4) denotes being shown hospitality (see 3.2.4) in being taken in as a guest and sharing in table fellowship (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992:374). Given his skills and experience, the steward could only be hired by elites. Since he, however, belongs to the retainer class (see 3.2.5), his prospect of employment rests with the ruling class that would use retainers and their services (Herzog 1994:256). The problem was that they would not trust him to act as the steward of their estates, as he was known to be corrupt. Kloppenborg (1989:491) states that, from a Roman perspective, the possibility that an owner might be defrauded by a clever manager was a common fear among owners. He therefore decided to focus on another socio-economic group for his future security. According to Nolland (1993:798) it is clear that the steward specifically had the debtors of his master in mind. Herzog (1994:247) states that the view commonly held by many scholars is that the debtors in the parable are peasant tenants or sharecroppers who till the ground in their master's field and maintain his orchards. There were three categories of tenants – those who (a) paid a percentage of the crop in rent, (b) those who paid a fixed portion of the crop in rent and (c) those who paid a fixed rent in cash. The tenants in this parable appeared to be of the first type, since the steward could reduce the percentages they owed the landlord.

The tenants probably were peasant farmers who had lost their land through heavy indebtedness. As such they would hardly be living above the subsistence level, due to all the taxes they had

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to pay. So the reduction of their debts[66] by the steward relieves their burden in a material sense (3.2.5). The act of reducing the size of the debts of others was an act of benefaction (3.2.2). In the moral and political economy of antiquity, this act imposed an obligation on the recipients. In other words, the steward had in effect become a patron and the debtors his clients (3.2.2). As described in 3.2.2, the Roman social institution known as *clientele*, or, in a modern terms patronage, was a fundamental and pervasive form of dependency relation involving the reciprocal exchange of goods and services between socially superior patrons and their socially inferior clients, which shaped both the public and private sectors of ancient life, as well as the political and religious symbolisation of power and dependency. In view of this, the expectation that he might be received into their households is a reasonable one, and also connotes hospitality (3.2.4).

Although this action might disturb the balance of honour (3.2.1) in his society (Combrink 1996:302), by reducing the size of the debts owed to the landowner and increasing the debt of honour owed to him as benefactor to the debtors, from the steward's point of view his actions are prudent, since maintaining his honour was vitally important (3.2.1). And, in the case of the master, if the master consents that the reductions should stand, he would also be celebrated far and wide as an honourable and plentiful man (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992:37). The steward counts on the latter, because he has come to know the landowner as a kind-hearted and generous man and he knows that the master would rather prefer to be honoured by the tenants than to recover his money. If the master insisted on getting his money back, however, his honour would be affected in public. However, to do nothing would also have resulted in the landlord being seen as weak, unable to control his estate or steward, and therefore without honour. And for this reason the master's praise would have come as a complete surprise to the debtors, since they would not have anticipated that he would condone the steward dispensing his wealth and re-establishing the balance in a society of limited goods (Combrink 1996:303).

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[66] According to Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:375), the amount of the debts that is involved as recorded in the parable is extraordinary. Probably it was equivalent to 900 gallons of oil and 150 bushels of wheat. It is large enough that it may be the tax debts of an entire village.

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Another point of concern has to do with the steward's action in reducing the debts. Was the steward dishonestly falsifying the records in order to gain the favour of the debtors, or was he shrewdly sacrificing his own prospect of short-term loan gains for long-term benefits? Culpepper (1995:308) gives three alternatives in respect to this:

(a) the steward was cheating the master by reducing the size of the debts;

(b) the steward was acting righteously by excluding the interest that had been figured into the debt but prohibited by Deut. 23:19-20; or

(c) the steward reduced the debt due by the amount of his own commission that had been included in the debt.

Culpepper (1995:308) adds that the first two options give the impression that the steward's action cost the master money, while the last gives the impression that the steward sacrificed his own income. If the first option is accepted, then the steward's action is illegal and dishonest and he thus continues squandering his master's goods and should therefore be charged again. The third option makes his actions entirely legal. The second option is more complicated, as the steward can then be understood to be showing goodness on behalf of the master to the tenants, who are not aware that the steward had been removed from his position. He may, for example, be removing interest that the master had being imposing, thereby complying with the scriptural prohibition of usury, even though such commercial deals were common.[67] The partial remittals of their debts also suggests that the steward expected the debtors to settle at least a part of their accounts as a result of the reduction, although probably not until the

[67] In view of this, Herzog (1994:252) is of the opinion that, if the master of the steward is a Jew, he has an image problem. He needs to be obedience to the Torah even in the pursuing of the accumulation of resources in order to meet with his class and political ambitions. But the steward plays a decisive role, since the steward writes the usurious contracts with the hidden interest rates. If the contracts were to be declared to be usurious, the steward would be declared guilty, not the master. In this situation, created by the conflict between the demands of the Torah and the pressures of commercialisation on the economy, the master could usually escape being found out and collect his hidden interest, knowing that the steward would take the fall.

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following harvest. Moreover, the reductions themselves were honest and permissible, given the discretion and authority entrusted to commercial stewards (Goodrich 2012:564). The difficulty that arises with the second option is that the 100% interest on the oil is excessive, even by ancient Near Eastern standards, and the difference between that rate of interest and the 25% interest on the wheat is strange. As far as answering the question if the steward was dishonest in all his dealings, there is no consensus amongst scholars, but according to Culpepper's (1995:308) assessment of the economic conventions of the time,

> … The simplest solution, and the one that gives the parable the greatest punch, is to take the first alternative: the steward is dishonest, and he continues to squander the master's goods by arbitrarily slashing the amounts owed by his debtors. Accordingly, there is no need to reconcile the difference between the amount the debts are reduced, no need to explain what would amount to 100% interest on the oil, and no difficulty in working out the legalities of the steward's actions. If the steward was merely cutting out his own commission on the loans, as proponents of the third option advocate, then wherein did the master stand to gain from these transaction …

The first option is also to be favoured, since the steward has been labelled as dishonest by his master in v. 8a. From his master's point of view he thus is nothing more than a dishonest steward in the manner he uses his possessions.

3.3.7. "And the master praised the unjust steward for he acted prudently" (v. 8a)

Earlier in this research work, it was stated that the major problem in this parable that has been troubling its interpreters is the landlord's praise for the unjust steward. There is no doubt in terms of the reading of the parable up to now that a steward who had acted unjustly by wasting his master's properties or possessions, and who took a decision after he had been informed of his dismissal to further defraud his master, is praised in the parable as having acted prudently or shrewdly (3.3.6). Scott (1989:264) states that "[t]he parable's last line created tension within the narrative that the steward acted prudently confirms the rogue image, but the master's commendation frustrates the hearer's anticipation that he would respond in anger". This put the master in a negative light and the plot's logic indeed demands punishment not praise.

The unexpectedness of the tension created by v. 8 has to do with the master's praise and the steward's unjustness and shrewdness. Having realised the kindness of the master in not putting

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him in prison, but rather asking him to put the account of his stewardship in order without demanding repayment, the steward depends on the same reaction in the system he puts into motion. It is ultimately this arrangement that places the master in an unusual bind that, if the master withdraws the steward's action (3.3.6), the master may in turn risk a backlash in the village, where the villagers would have already been rejoicing his surprising generosity. If the master, however, consents that the reductions should stand, he will be celebrated far and wide as an honourable and plentiful man by those lower down on the economic scale than himself (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992:37).

The steward counts on the latter, because he has come to know the landowner as a kind-hearted and generous man and he knows that the master would rather prefer to be honoured by the tenants than recover his money. If the master insisted on getting his money back, his honour would be damaged by public mockery. And for that the master's praise must have come to the audience as a surprise, since they would not have anticipated that he would condone the steward dispensing wealth and re-establishing the balance in the society of limited goods (Combrink 1996:303).

In the words of Herzog (1994:257),

> … The steward indeed has displayed his resourcefulness to his master. The debtors think that they have received a generous dividend from their master or patron, in their joy they overlook the obligation they have taken upon themselves. When the patron gives, he also indebts. By signing their revised *Grammata* with the reduced amounts, the debtors have also signed a new contract with a different kind of hidden interests, and they will pay for their good fortunes. Clients always do. The steward has not cheated the master; he has placed new cards in the master's hand. Seeing the steward's strategy and tactics, the master commends him for his shrewdness. The master has taken a short term loss and has been reminded of the value of the steward, but he will realise long term gain.

The problem with this interpretation is that it assumes a sociological dynamic that does not appear explicitly in the parable. Furthermore, not only does the steward's offense plainly concern the loss of possessions (rather than just honour), but it is the master's praise and approval normally given for loyal servitude that brought about *economic* benefit. Thus, while there might be some validity to this position, it cannot entirely explain the master's praise. It remains very strange for a man who has been defrauded to praise the one who defrauded him.

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In line with the discussion above, it is better to argue that, when faced with a dangerous situation, the steward devised a way to change it from a catastrophe to a moment of rejoicing. DE Silva (1993:263-264), however, states that this behaviour of praising a trickster is not different from the strangeness of the behaviour of the landowner, who pays the hired workers the same wage (even if this makes no economic sense and leads to him losing the praise of his clients), or the extravagant father who unreservedly welcomed his prodigal son. DE Silva added that, there is thus no reason to argue that the master was making the best of a bad situation by accepting the honour of the debtors. His praise is for the speed, urgency and cunning with which the steward acted in the light of his impending removal.

3.4. The parable: application (from story to Kingdom) (v. 9)

The parable does not only recommend the unjust steward, but also encourages the audience to emulate the steward by using their earthly resources to make friends for themselves on earth so that, when all is gone, they will be received into the eternal dwelling "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcome into eternal dwellings" (NIV Luke 16:9). Just like v. 8, this verse has also generated mixed feelings on what really should be emulated. Could the parable be seen as encouraging dishonest behaviour among its hearers?

Scholars like Mathewson (1995:38) and Ireland (1989:299-300) understand v. 9 as a fitting application of the parable and as a call for resolute action in the face of crisis. According to Mathewson (1995:38), Jesus' "disciples are to use their material possessions and money for spiritual purposes as wisely as the worldly people do for material aims". Ireland (1989:299-300) says that, "[i]nstead of an exhortation for disciples to use their possessions with eternity in view, the parable is viewed in more general terms as a call for resolute action in the face of the eschatological crisis caused by the coming (present, imminent, and/or future) of the Kingdom of God". Culpepper (1995:309) has stated that v. 9 thus marks a new beginning, with the expression "and I tell you" clarifying the meaning of the mysterious comment in v. 8b by challenging the disciples to be equally wise in using their material possessions so that, when the unrighteous mammon fails, they will have an eternal home. Understanding the warning from this perspective yields an interpretation that is constant with Luke's understanding of material possessions throughout the Gospel.· It therefore is important to briefly investigate

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Luke's understanding of wealth (3.4.1.1), the kingdom of God (3.4.1.2) and stewardship (3.4.1.3) further.

3.5. Wealth and possession in Luke

3.5.1. The correct use of wealth and possessions in Luke 16

According to Ireland (1989:315), Luke 16:1-19 is about the correct use of wealth and possessions. The following items in Luke 16:1-13 and its immediate context are significant in this regard. The word "mammon" occurs in vs. 9, 11 and 13; Luke comments that the Pharisees were lovers of money in v. 14; while the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in vs. 19-31 illustrates the dire consequences of serving mammon. Ireland (1989:315) says the parable of the shrewd steward also implies that the positive course of action (exhorted in v. 9) includes care for the poor. So it seems clear that Luke's understanding of Luke 16:1-9 is that it is about the prudent use of one's possessions, and this should be reflected in the interpretation of the parable it contains. It therefore also is necessary to take note of Luke's emphasis on wealth and possession in his Gospel as the broader theological and literary context within which to understand the parable.

The Gospel of Luke has a clear focus on the situation of the poor and the marginalised. In it, Jesus' attitude, actions, and teachings constantly warn that the poor were being abused and neglected (Woodbridge and Semmelink 2014:59). Luke is also fond of challenging the rich in his community on their attitude toward material possessions. In the travel narrative, where his view of wealth and possession is made clear by parables such as that of the rich fool (Lk 12:13-21), the great feast (Lk 14:15-32), the unjust steward (Lk 16:1-13) and the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31), and in Jesus' teaching on the right use of wealth and possessions, Luke on the one hand teaches the total renunciation of goods as the cost of discipleship, and on the other hand encourages the good stewardship of wealth and possessions (Reinstorf 2002:1288).

Reinstorf (2002:1293), who not only explains how the Gospel of Luke often portrays the Pharisees as "lovers of money", but also how it will be difficult for them to enter the Kingdom of God, emphasises that Jesus' disciples were also shocked by his teachings, because their mind-set was that, if the rich in the parables, who were understood by them as those blessed by God, cannot enter the kingdom, who can? Jesus had thus confronted the system and the belief

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of his day on wealth and possession. From Jesus' point of view, wealth is not necessarily a divine favour as it was understood in his time, as it could prove to be an obstacle in a believer's relationship with God. For this reason, according to Puica (2009:39), Jesus commanded his disciples, unlike the Pharisees, to make friends for themselves by making use of the world's medium of exchange they would be welcomed into God's internal dwellings. That is to say, their wealth is not to be their lord, but rather must be placed on the altar of service for the Lord. It was to be used to serve the poor and the needy, thereby earning them an eternal reward. According to Jesus, the Pharisees, on the other hand, had sold out to the love of money and looked only to what money could provide them in the present age. Jesus, however, warned his disciples of the danger of a wrong attitude to wealth, which would result in making ineffective any service that is rendered to him (Lk 16:13). Jesus' opponents' hostility and sarcasm (Lk 16:14) underline the truth of Jesus' prior statement, that the love of wealth will result in a hatred for God (Lk 16:13).

This hostile exchange between Jesus and his opponents in Luke 16:14 reveals the related issue of pride and prepares for the following parable (Lk 16:19-31), which relates how the love of money and pride fit hand in glove, as it is the love of money and pride that lie at the root of the rich man's extravagant lifestyle (Puica 2009:39). According to the Lukan Jesus, the shrewd steward ultimately used his entrusted wealth correctly for the welfare of the poor debtors, so that according to Luke 16:9 he would have been received into the eternal dwellings because of his generosity. In the parable of the rich man, however, the rich man uses his wealth for selfish ends, and so in terms of Luke 16:9 he would not be received in the eternal dwellings of God.

It thus is clear that the two parables present two different uses of possessions: the shrewd steward is portrayed as blessed, while the rich man is presented as a failure. Both parables thus serve as a warning to the rich, like the man in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, who were using their material possessions for their own selfish ends without considering who was dying from hunger and disease (Kim 1998:188-191).

It is clear that Luke 16:1-9 is embedded in a section of Luke's Gospel on the correct use of wealth and possessions, which links it to his overall emphasis on wealth and possessions. It therefore is necessary to briefly survey the Gospel of Luke's teaching on the theme of wealth and possessions.

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3.5.2. Wealth and possessions in the Gospel of Luke

In Luke it is not just Jesus who teaches about the correct use of possessions. Both Jesus and his forerunner John are depicted as warning people of the danger of greed in comments unique to Luke (Burridge 2007:262). John proclaims a gospel with a strong message about the correct use of wealth. In Luke 3:10-14 the ethical teaching issued by John the Baptist is presented as a reply to the question, "what then shall we do?" (v. 10). This question, in turn, is a response to the sermon of John the Baptist, which is marked by an imminent eschatology demanding the production of good fruits. John replies to the question in v. 10 by demanding that "He who has two coats, should share with him who has none; and he who has food should do likewise" (v. 11). The second and third questions recorded in vs. 12-14 elicit responses by John to the tax collectors and the soldiers that intend to protect the poor and the powerless from being extorted and exploited (Kim 1998:168-170). Luke thus presents John the Baptist as teaching the same ethic in regard to possessions as Jesus (Kim 1998:170).

The teaching of Jesus on this subject in Luke is also extensive. In Luke 6:27-38, Jesus is recorded as urging his followers to give to everyone who begs from them. Again, this recommendation of giving generously is in keeping with John the Baptist's exhortation to share material possessions with destitute people (Kim 1998:171, 173). In fact, it is only in Luke that the rich man who asked about eternal life is described. Luke records how he was asked to "Sell all that you have", but then goes away sad. Luke also includes Jesus' comment to the Pharisees about cleaning the outside of the cup in the slightly obscure instruction to give alms for those things that are within (Lk 11:41) (Burridge 2007:262).

In most of the parables of Jesus a glimpse is given of the centrality of the proper stewardship of possession for him. Even the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:27-37) has the main point that love of one's neighbour means being ready and willing to help others in a material and physical predicament (v. 37) (Kim 1998:177). The parable of the great banquet (Lk 14:12-24) indicates a profound gulf between the rich and the poor in the Lukan Community[68] in that,

[68] The term "Lukan community" is a contentious one. Allison (1988:66), who acknowledge the difficulties surrounding the term, states that, "…the third gospel and the Acts of the Apostle

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although both of them share the same faith, the rich still conduct themselves according to the customs of their contemporary culture, in which the reciprocity system of relationships was the predominant one (see 3.2.2). The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) therefore serves as a warning that, in the coming kingdom of God, the rich and the poor will experience a role reversal.[69] This warning corresponds with that given to the rich in Luke 6:24-25, namely that they have received their consolation in this world, but shall hunger, mourn and weep in the world to come. It also demonstrates a continuity in Luke's concern for the poor and of his warning of the rich that the reversal of fortune in the coming age, which is also found in the Magnificant (Lk 1:53), and woes to the rich (Lk 6:24-26) are unavoidable.

The story of the rich ruler and Zacchaeus in Luke 18:18-19:10 is also important in the quest to bring the Lukan concept of wealth and possession to the fore. In contrast to the rich ruler, as observed above, who goes away sadly but not doing what Jesus asked him to do, Zacchaeus gave away half of his possessions and returned to those whom he defrauded fourfold. All these acts result in his salvation. This also differentiates Zacchaeus from the stories of the rich fool and the rich man and Lazarus, which are both unique to Luke (Burridge 2007:262). Kim (1998:194) the story of the rich ruler may be seen as Jesus' criticism of the rich members amongst his followers who were reluctant and hesitant to share their possessions with the poor. In the story of Zacchaeus, which occurs in a strategic place of Luke's travel narrative, Luke emphasises this point. It can be said that the Zacchaeus incident is one of the most important in the Gospel of Luke, for in terms of literary quality and contents it reveals the author's intentions concerning almsgiving and his interest in the poor in his gospel (Kim 1998:194).

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give every impression of having been written without much special concern for some "Lukan Community." Moxnes (1994:387) suggest that "we can envisage Luke's community as a group of non-elite persons who are culturally and ethnically mixed but who also include among them some who come from the elite periphery." It is difficult to be more specific than Moxnes' description of the community for which Luke was written.

[69] In Luke 16:25 (NIV), Jesus says, "But Abraham replied, 'son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony'."

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The diminutive tax collector, Zacchaeus, thus plays a significant role in Luke's Gospel (Ireland 1992:190).

Kim (1998:195) stated that, when the rich ruler and Zacchaeus (18:18-27, 19:1-10) are viewed from the perspective of the literary context in which they are imbedded, they constitute a single literary thought unit in structure and content. The story of the rich ruler is about a man who was not willing to let go of his possession for the sake of the poor and, as such, is portrayed as a model of failed or unfaithful stewardship. Zacchaeus, on the other hand, is presented as a model of successful stewardship, since he was willing to give up part of his ill-gained possessions for the care of the poor. For this reason, the kind of steward Luke has in mind is unlike the rich ruler, who, because of his excessive love of wealth, did not want to give alms to the poor, but rather like Zacchaeus, whose eyes were opened that he could clearly see the need of the poor in his community (Kim 1998:195-197). He thus conforms to Luke's picture of the kind of stewardship that he wanted his community to practise. Wealth should thus be used wisely. Similarly, the parable of the shrewd steward concludes with a call that those who have material wealth ("unrighteous mammon") should use it in a manner that would let God welcome them into his eternal home. These passages, which are unique to Luke, provide us with a clear and consistent teaching about Jesus' concern for the poor and warnings for the rich. The giving away of possessions appears to be a central aspect thereof[70] (Burridge 2007:262). Marshall (1994:1006) has in this regard stated that the parable may have intended that people

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[70] The second book of Luke (Acts) give a picture of the early community that one may say focus on alleviating the suffering of the poor among them was. It is recorded in Acts 2:44-45 and 4:32-35 that all who believe were together and shared all things in common. They are depicted as selling their goods and possession and sharing with all who have need. The concern for the proper care of the needy, widows in particular, in Acts 6:1-6 prompted the appointment of the second deacons. Even those who did not sell their houses used them to host the community, such as the house of Mary, where the community gathered to pray for Peter (12:12-18). The acts of hosting would also have include the provision of food and other needs (Burridge 2007:262-263)

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in Luke's community should learn from the shrewd steward and use their wealth correctly in the care of others.

From the discussion above one can see that Luke wanted to encourage the proper stewardship of wealth and possessions for the sake of the poor and the needy in the community. He thus presents examples of both faithful and unfaithful rich people in a contrasting manner. It also confirms that the parable under consideration (Lk 16:1-9), despite its lingering interpretive problems, is to be understood as teaching the proper use of wealth and possession for the sake of the poor. Attention therefore needs to be given to the verses that follow it, vs. 9-13, since they are generally acknowledged as being Luke's own commentary on the parable. What is most important in theses passages is that they show that the focus of this parable is not on the behaviour of the master, but on that of the steward, because his has an impact on the poor. This is made clear in v. 9, where the action taken by the steward decreases the financial burden of the owner's debtors.[71] Nolland (1992:802), commenting on this, has argued that

> [a] new section begins here that runs to the end of the chapter and has quite close links with the preceding section: Luke 15 has emphasized divine initiative and heavenly joy, with repentance in the background; now human responsibility is stressed, especially in connection with the attitude to and the use of wealth, and the divine initiative is only briefly alluded.

One may thus conclude that Luke intended to criticise the wrong use of wealth and possession, which appears to have been prevalent in his community. The parable of the shrewd steward therefore cannot be understood in isolation. It needs to be integrated into its immediate and broader literary context. The summary of the three points of Ireland (1992:196-197) concerning the impact of Luke's teaching on riches and poverty must thus be taken into consideration. Firstly, the theme lends weight to the traditional interpretation that the parable in question addresses the correct use of material possessions in that Jesus urges his disciples in the parable

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[71] According to Puica (2009:34), the shrewd steward made use of the opportunity to prepare for the future through his urgent action toward the debtors of his master. The steward did this by generously reducing the debt of each of the debtors to ensure a reception into the homes of the master' debtors after his official dismissal.

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to use worldly wealth to gain friends for themselves. Secondly, the juxtaposition of the parable in question and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in the same chapter fits a pattern found elsewhere in the Lukan material on possessions.[72] This pattern underlines that the parable in question is about the wise use of possessions. Thirdly, the religious issue at the heart of the Lukan theme of material possession accentuates the importance of the wise use of possessions as commanded in the parable under consideration. No servant can serve two masters and to make friends with worldly wealth entails charity to the poor and to act with urgency (Lk 16:9-13). This reading of the text within its literary context (both immediate and broader) gives a clear understanding of the text (the parable in questions) as teaching the proper use of possession than a reading which only focuses on its individual elements.

3.5.3. The Kingdom of God, eschatology and Luke 16:1-9

Another significant context for the interpretation of the text in question is Luke's eschatology and understanding of the coming Kingdom of God. The relevance of this theme in interpreting this text is suggested when the prominence of eschatological overtones in the text in question, as well as in its immediate literary context and in related material on the theme of possessions, is taken into consideration. The prudent use of possessions demanded by Luke 16:1-9 is both proof of one's citizenship of the Kingdom of God, and the actualisation of the values of the kingdom in expectation of its final manifestation (Ireland 1992:189). The parable warns believers of the importance of preparing for the crisis the kingdom brings with the same zeal and prudence with which the steward acted. Goodrich (2012:566) states in this regard that the parable in question illustrates the strict ethical demands of the Kingdom of God, while remaining a realistic depiction firmly fixed in its cultural context.

It is clear that the presence of the Kingdom of God and the coming eschaton are important themes in Luke's Gospel (Marshall 1994:1006). In this regard, Chilton (2008:519) states that:

> … The most confident equation between the kingdom and the one who preaches it is offered in Luke. Though Luke assumed that Jesus preaches the kingdom (Lk

[72] Luke illustrates the wise and foolish uses of possessions in close connection with each other several times (Lk 12:22-34 with 12:13-21; 19:1-10 with 18:18-23 and Ac 4:36-37 with 5:1-11).

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> 4:43), the instance of initial preaching which precedes that notice has Jesus quoting scripture to the effect that he is God's anointed Luke (4:16-21). This Christological self-consciousness goes hand in hand with Luke's unique insistence that while the kingdom of God is in the midst of the disciples, the son of man is coming to them as a flash of lightning Luke (17:20, 24). The apparent tension, commonly observed by modern theologians, between the "now" and the "not yet" of God's action is both emphasised and resolved in Luke by seeing Jesus as the agent of the eschatological agent of the kingdom in every time …

In the Gospel of Luke, the kingdom for Jesus was a profound force that resulted in demons being cast out, the sick being healed, lepers being cleansed and the dead being raised. The relationship between the Kingdom of God and Jesus' ministry is clear from the outset of his ministry in Luke. It was Jesus' programme to enact and perform the Kingdom of God (Chilton 2008:522). Despite its centrality in the ministry of the Lukan Jesus, however, the Kingdom of God remains a difficult phenomenon to understand.

Ireland (1992:199-200, 209-210), who acknowledges three interpretations of the Kingdom of God by scholars (the kingdom as a future reality, realised or present, and both present and future), states that the reason Jesus's teaching on the kingdom is complex is that it includes both present and future aspects. In the Gospel of Luke, both the present and the future are endorsed. The Kingdom of God is thus twofold in nature for him, since God's eschatological redemptive activity has on the one hand been initiated in history with the ministry of Jesus (Lk 4:18-19, 21), while on the other hand it simultaneously moves according to the plan of God toward its consummation at the *parousia* (Acts 3:21). Ireland (1992:211-12) says the structure of redemptive history as embedded in both Luke-Acts is that of promises and fulfilment. The latter takes place in two phases, which are parallel to the two features of the coming of the kingdom. The tightness between these phases, between the now and not yet of the kingdom, is at the heart of Luke's theology. Importantly, according to Ireland (1992:211-12), both the present and the future aspects of the kingdom were understood by Luke as having a bearing on how one uses possessions.

On the one hand, the future aspect gives hope and encouragement to Jesus' ethical teaching by reminding the reader of the coming reward and judgement (Lk 7:35; 12:35-46; 14:13-14). On the other hand, if the Kingdom of God was already at hand, it must make a difference to the ethical standards of its members. Being part of this kingdom changes a person's whole life, not

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only in terms of humanity's relation with God her creator, but also how humankind relate to one another.

The standard expected by the kingdom can be best seen in the command to love God and others[73] (Lk 10:25-37; 6:27-36). Jesus' commandments are the tangible application of the great principle of love. Love manifests in the kingdom and gives clear evidence of one's membership in it (Lk 6:35-36, 6:20). Charity is the kingdom behaviour expected of those anticipating the arrival of the coming age. If salvation means God bringing to an end the oppression his people are going through (Lk 4:18), then God's people must stop oppressing their fellow human beings (Lk 3:12-14); if it means an end to hunger and want, God's people must share what they have with those who are hungry and naked (Lk 3:11). When such behaviour is found in the disciples, it gives a picture of how the kingdom has begun to be realised.

It is clear from the discussion above that eschatology is part of the theological context of Luke's ethic of possession – particularly for its charitable use for the poor. Eschatological notes are present throughout Luke. They are present in Luke 12:13, where seeking the kingdom entails using one's possessions to help the poor (vs. 12:33; 35-48). A person who, by virtue of his membership in the kingdom, recognises this fact will want to transform the wealth of this age into what counts as wealth in the value system of the world to come. And one way to do this would be by making use of his/her earthly possessions to help the needy (Lk 12:33; 18:22; 16:9). Through such acts of love for the poor and the needy, the disciples of Jesus give testimony to their loyalty and create a foretaste of the life of the kingdom in anticipation of its final coming. This expectation of the realisation of the life to come, or of the coming kingdom, is illustrated in the life of the early church in (Ac 2:42-47; 4:32-37).

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[73] The love at the heart of kingdom is behind all the radical commandments on possessions in Luke-Acts (12:33; 14:33; 18:22). Love also highlights the central religious issue, the issue of one's attitude to God, in all the teaching on riches and poverty in Luke-Acts.

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3.6. Conclusion

To conclude, though the reading of the parable within its social context, and in line with the model of honour and shame, did not provide a reason for the master's commendation, reading the parable within its immediate and broader literary context has provided insight into its potential meaning. The major thrust of the parable lies in the praise of the steward's shrewd use of money in the face of a forthcoming crisis. Knowing that he will soon be destitute, the steward devises a plan. He uses the power available to him to make friends to gain some favours, assuming that these favours could be cashed in when his removal is finalised. According to Puica (2009:40), the parable thus conveys one central truth. It is not an elaborate allegory in which each person, attitude, word and action represents a hidden code.

The parable thus speaks of creativity and unlimited commitment in a time of crisis. As Nolland (1992:803) has pointed out, the key to understanding the parable is to note how the steward shrewdly evaluated the situation in which he found himself and acted wisely to save himself from it. The inevitability of the coming judgement of the kingdom provides one with a new use for wealth and new reason for investment in relationships. The parable is calling on the reader to act in the light of an understanding of the significance of the hour. When faced with an immediate crisis, the steward acted wisely to take care of himself. One may say this is a call for a resolute decision in the light of the coming judgement of God.

With regard to the coming judgement of God, Ireland (1992:214-215) has raised three points on the importance of eschatology in relation to the parable under consideration that are noteworthy.

Firstly, the centrality of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching substantiates the eschatological note in the parable and its immediate context. This note is present in the image of eschatological judgement in the account the steward is called to give (Lk 16:2), in the master's commendation of the steward for having acted shrewdly, in the contrast between the sons of this age and the sons of light (Lk 16:8b), and in the description of both the steward and mammon as unrighteous and the reference to eternal dwellings.

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Secondly, both aspects of the kingdom present in the parable have an important bearing on its interpretation. The imminent judgement in the steward's dismissal emphasises the need for a decisive response and imparts a sense of urgency to Jesus' exhortation. This is indeed made clear by providing a reminder that faithfulness and unfaithfulness will be rewarded and punished.

Thirdly, the fact that good deeds are a manifestation of present sonship, as recorded in Luke 6:35-36, and an expression of gratitude for present salvation (Lk 7:47; 19:8-9), confirms that the parable does not teach works-righteousness. The charitable actions expected by the parable, and v. 9 in particular, must be understood in the context of what it means to be a true disciple, a son of God, a member of the kingdom.

The discussion in 3.4.1 has furthermore helped in broadening the understanding of the parable under consideration. The thread of Luke's riches and poverty theology confirms that the parable teaches the proper stewardship of wealth and possession. It is not just about bearing the coming judgement in mind and acting in a general sense in accordance with it. *It is specifically used by Luke as an exhortation to show charity to the poor and the needy in Luke's community.*

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Chapter 4

The meaning of Luke 16:1-9 in the contemporary Nigerian context

4.1. **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on applying the socio-scientific reading undertaken of Luke 16:1-9 to the Nigerian context. In doing so it will engage with the efforts made by selected African (Nigerian) scholars and pastors as represented by Nicodemus and Isaak in interpreting and applying this text (4.2). The hope is that this overview will give other interpreters access to African voices on the text. The application of this parable to contemporary African society is justified, as the parable in question can deconstruct or criticise our symbolic universe by challenging our values and beliefs, as it did those of the original first-century audience.

4.2. **African (Nigerian) Scholars' Interpretation of Luke 16:1-9**

It appears that not much has been written on Luke 16:1-9 by African, and specifically Nigerian, scholars and pastors.[74] Those who have however written about it have also taken notice of the interpretive challenge posed by the parable of the shrewd steward. They are in agreement with the conclusion of other scholars surveyed in this study that the parable is the most difficult of all the parables of Jesus (1.1), as "incompetence, dishonesty, and corruption seem to be rewarded". For example, Nicodemus (2015:1) from Nigeria, who has preached on this parable, explains that the parable has puzzled many people through the ages, as it is unacceptable that an unfaithful steward, about to be relieved of his position, gains praise from his employer when he ends his career by stealing more from him. To make the situation worse, Nicodemus (2015:1) asks how can a rich man, who has made his money on the backs of the poor, and his unscrupulous manager be held up by Jesus as object lessons for his disciples and all the others listening to his teaching?

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[74] Despite an exhaustive literature search, I found very few published works by Africans on this parable.

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Other African scholars, however, believe that story embedded in the parable when read in its literary context is not on dishonesty, but on prudence (Isaak 2006:1236). They state that the task for us today is to have the shrewdness of the steward to understand our context and to wisely make use of any opportunity that exists in the midst of danger. In this regard, Nicodemus (2015:4) states that the challenge the text in question post to Nigerians is that the steward is

> … commended for his shrewdness. The Greek word used here is *phronemos*, which means to act with wisdom, intelligence, and prudence. It also has the connotation of doing what's in your own interest. The same word is used in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount when he concluded, "*Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and put them into practice is like a wise* [phronemos] *man who built his house on a rock*" (Mt 7:24). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is saying it is in your best interest, it is a wise and intelligent action to build your life on his teachings. Jesus is commending a crook, not because he's a scoundrel, but because he acted with intelligence and cleverness. Jesus is saying essentially, "Look, if a scoundrel can act shrewdly to save his hide, shouldn't the children of light act shrewdly to advance the kingdom of God? Shouldn't believers be just as shrewd as unbelievers?"

As a way of applying the text, especially the shrewd acts of the steward, to the situation of the youth in Nigeria, where poverty is a major challenge for them, Nicodemus (2015:4) suggests that Christian youth need to look urgently for a solution, just like the steward in the parable, in order to free themselves from their predicament by creating ways of self-employment. The reason for his emphasis is that, despite the fact that Nigeria is blessed with abundant resources, many of its youth still struggle to find something to do for living. The story of the unjust steward therefore is timely for them as individuals and as a church, as it reminds them that they need to be wise and prudent in converting the opportunities and abundant resources that God had given them, as did the steward in the text in the parable. If the youth of Nigeria thus make use of their limited opportunities, they will be able to secure a new future. The focus of the abovementioned African scholars is thus on the praise of the dishonest manager, because he acted shrewdly in that he took careful advantage of the opportunity he had. He acted to secure his future.

Isaak (2006:1236), who interpreted the parable in line with its immediate literary context (Luke 15 – the parable of the prodigal son), has stated that the parable of the prodigal son introduces the story of a young man who is said to have wasted his wealth through self-indulgent living, thus the parable under consideration also presents us with a story of a steward who is entrusted

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with his master's goods, but who initially wasted those goods (the text does not however explain how the steward wasted the goods). The steward, however, repented and used the goods entrusted to him in a responsible way to secure his future. Luke 15 teaches that, if we sinfully waste our lives and then at the eleventh hour come to our senses and come back to God in sincere repentance, we shall meet a waiting, running, embracing, kissing and partying God ready to welcome us, just like it happened to the prodigal son. Luke 16:1-9 tells a similar story. If we waste our lives and the future is uncertain, then at the eleventh hour we must use our possessions to help others; if we do this we are assured that God will welcome us into his eternal dwelling (Isaak 2006:1236).

It is interesting that the selected examples of African interpretations of this parable do not differ significantly from those of scholars on other continents. The interpretive difficulty of this challenging parable is acknowledged, and there is a suggestion to interpret it by using the immediate literary context (as suggested in 2.2). Nicodemus (2015:1) makes it clear that the parable of the shrewd steward is one part of a larger whole. The entire chapter 16 of Luke revolves around the central theme of material possessions. The parable of the unjust steward is, however, not the sum and substance of Jesus' teaching on the subject. It is part of the much broader teaching of Jesus on the subject of possessions throughout the entire Gospel of Luke, and continued in Acts.[75]

As to the application of the parable of the shrewd steward, Isaak (2006:1236) explains that Jesus used the example of wealth to speak to the disciples about social responsibility and stewardship. They are urged to be and remain faithful in the use of their earthly wealth, because it is a loan from God. Discipleship means single-minded devotion to serving God with our

[75] Nicodemus (2015:2) provides a summary of four principles of material possession that the Lukan Jesus taught: (a) Jesus turned the way men should view money upside-down; (b) True repentance and faith will dramatically change the way a follower of Christ thinks and acts with regard to material possessions; (c) The true disciple comes to realise that money cannot get him the things that are really important, but that Christ can; (d) The best that we can do with money is to use it now to produce those things which will last.

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earthly possessions, while not neglecting to share our wealth with our community to meet their needs. From this point of view one can say that African scholars acknowledge the difficulty posed by the parable and understand it as teaching the right use of possessions or proper stewardship, which is a particular challenge on the continent and in Nigeria in particular.

4.3.The relevance of Luke 16:1-9 for Nigeria

The significance of the parable under consideration for the contemporary Nigerian society is its stress on the need for proper stewardship of our material possession in response to the crisis of the last hour. This is a very important focus, since the lack of proper stewardship of possessions in African society, and Nigeria and the southern Kaduna state in particular, cannot be overemphasised.

It is no secret that Nigeria has been assessed as having very high levels of corruption. According to Anazodo, Ibeto and Nkah (2015:42),

> One of the major challenges facing Nigeria and other developing countries of the world is, how to create a context of stable political and socio-economic policies, environment and programs to be implemented. The issue of getting the right leadership to fight corruption and propel good governance has been a recurring challenge in Africa and Nigeria in particular.

Anazodo, Ibeto and Nkah (2015:47) state that "…in Nigeria today, corruption has become so common a word that its actual meaning need no explanation to an average Nigerian citizen". One can hardly read a single paper of the Nigerian national dailies without coming across a page devoted to corruption or the mention of corruption. But since this is an academic study, it is necessary to clear the air at this point on what corruption is all about. The meaning of corruption as a term is disputed. The word originated from the Latin word *Corruptus*, meaning an aberration or a misnomer (Anazodo, Ibeto and Nkah 2015:47). This implies that there is no general or comprehensive definition of what constitutes corrupt behaviour; the most prominent definitions share a common emphasis on the mishandling of "public power or position for personal advantage" (Ogbeidi 2012:5). Salisu (2000/2006:3), who also acknowledges the lack of a single definition of corruption, defines it as the "misapplication of public resources to private's ends." Example of this include an officer who collects bribes for issuing passports or visas, or for providing permits and licenses. In view of this, whatever kind of seasonal gifts,

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free air tickets, lunch or dinner, or "Kola"[76] can be seen as corruption since these are likely to influence future courses of action and transactions of the giver or the receiver, and thus breach rules and regulations in a society like that of Nigeria. This implies that one uses one's influence to gain certain advantages. Defining corruption politically, Ogbeidi (2012:5) states it "encompasses abuse by government officials such as embezzlement and cronyism, as well as abuses linking public and private actors such as bribery, extortion, influence peddling, and fraud, to mention but a few. In this regard, corruption threatens good governance, sustainable development, democratic process, and fair business practices." In view of the foregoing discussion and definition of corruption, one may be right to say that corruption affects every aspects of Nigerian society.

Despite abundant natural resources and high quality human capital, Nigeria is yet to take its rightful position among the nations. This is due to corruption, which has resulted in socio-economic stagnation (Ogbeidi 2021:1). Put differently, Nigeria has suffered due to a lack of faithful stewards, and therefore Luke 16:1-9 may provide its leaders with a new ethic. The corrupt manner in which the steward administrated his master's resources unfortunately resonates with the Nigeria situation, where some leaders are accumulating millions of naira in their accounts, eating lavish meals, owning houses in every state of the country, as well as numerous jeeps, limousines and the like at the expense of the poor. This application of the parable of the shrewd steward as condoning corruption serves as a warning against the literal reading of Biblical texts without considering their literary and social contexts.

Anazodo, Ibeto and Nkah (2015:43) have written that, since Nigeria gained her political independence in 1960, her leaders and their regimes have been guilty of corruption and bad governance. Examples are the obvious rigging of elections, the manipulation of census figures, violence, arson, vandalism, gangsterism, religious prejudice, regionalism and tribalism. It appears as if all forms of malpractice, crimes of every depiction, deception, lack of candour,

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[76] Kola literally refers to a particular fruit that is mostly eating by the Muslims. It also refers to whatever you give to somebody in order to influence him to give you what you need, especially illegally, such as a bribe.

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readiness to cheat, ethnic and sectional preferences are the only game in town. The result is the social dislocation, insecurity, violence, abject poverty and political instability that the country is experiencing currently. A society that is unjust and devoid of equity and equality will intrinsically be unstable, and this unfortunately is true of Nigeria today. Corruption can best be described as the goliath of Nigeria society (Evans and Alenoghena 2015:41). This sad state of affairs is despite the oil wealth, which has eclipsed the agriculture for which the country was known[77] when it gained independence on 1 October 1960. But, as the old cliché goes, oil has been a blessing and a curse to Nigeria (Salisu 2000/2006 :2). It is a blessing because the oil wealth provides Nigeria with easy entry into international capital markets, which has allowed the country to embark on large-scale public and private sector projects. However, the oil has also introduced opportunities for corruption in both the private and public sectors of the economy. These, in turn, have changed Nigerian politics and deepened ethnic rivalry, as access to and manipulation of the government spending process has become the entryway to riches (Salisu 2000 2006:2).

In view of this sad state of affairs, Evans and Alenoghena (2015:41) and Anozodo, Ibeto and Nkah (2015:43) have stated that a number of anti-corruption enforcement bodies have been established, including the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and others. But despite the successes achieved through these measures, the situation remains unacceptable, as corruption and bad leadership still pervade every facet of national life. Referring to petro-economics and corruption, Okolo and Etepke (2015:264) state that the anti-corruption bodies are unable to prosecute corruption because the judiciary, who are supposed to ensure that justice is done, are also corrupt. Prosecutors and judges seem to be conspiring with the accused to dishonestly obtain perpetual commands, or recurrent postponements, to frustrate the prosecution of cases. This development has succeeded because, in Nigeria, both the state and the private sector have reached the point where a small group of persons who control most of the nation's wealth are the same individuals who hold the most influential political offices in the country.

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[77] "Nigeria was known for her exports of agricultural products including groundnut, palm oil, cocoa, cotton, beans, timber, and hides and skin" (Salisu 2000/2006 :2).

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Anazodo, Ibeto and Nkah (2015:44) find it even more worrisome that, in spite of the popular anger against corruption and bad leadership, which have affected the wellbeing of all citizens, there appears to be a lack of collective action against the culprits, irrespective of their ethnic, religious, class or gender affiliation. Even the advent of popular movements has not succeeded in channelling the profound rage of the people into a series of actions that can challenge this deadly disease. Anazodo, Ibeto and Nkah (2015:44) explain that, while the rate of unemployment and its attendant poverty is on the increase at one extreme of the economy, the number of owners of private jets (some even clergy) has also increased at the other end. Poverty therefore exists side by side with obscene opulence. President Obasanjo's civil regime is estimated to have expended $16 billion on generating darkness for the country, while the same regime is yet to account for $20 billion diverted from the federal account. Insecurity has become a way of life in Nigeria, despite trillions of naira claimed to have been spent on security. The present insecurity situation in the country can be best attributed to the army of jobless youth. Power generation and telecommunication have fallen into disrepair, as have the railways. All of this comes down to corruption sanctioned by bad leadership and governance in the country. There are a few faithful stewards (men and women) of integrity who are attempting to harness and unleash the resources of the country as blessing for all its citizens.

Indeed, is hard to think of any social ill in Nigerian society, and in southern Kaduna in particular, that is not traceable to embezzlement and the misappropriation of funds and resources, like the dishonest act of the steward in the text in question, particularly as a direct or indirect consequences of this Goliath called corruption that is perpetrated through the heartless political class since the country got her independence. Although the resources squandered by the steward in the text were private, compared to the situation in Nigeria, where they are both private and public, the analogy in terms of wasting resources for personal interest needs to be noted well.

Ikharehon and Omoregie (2015:100) say the cycle of poverty keeps growing, with its attendant negative effects even as the rate of unemployment, as observed earlier, remains consistently high. By giving mediocrity advantage over intelligence through one-sidedness and cronyism, intellectual capital, which is the bulwark of development and advancement, has continued to drift abroad in search of greener pastures. Ikharehon and Omoregie (2015:100) point out that, paradoxically, the scourge of corruption has left a country like Nigeria endowed with huge

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natural resources straddling two economic worlds at the same time. To state it more obviously, Nigeria has found itself in the predicament of a country too rich to be poor and at the same time too poor to be rich. Thus, this has made it predictable for citizen of Nigeria to become victims of corruption (Ikharehon and Omoregie 2015:100).

Reflecting on this deadly disease, Achebe (1984:1) has argued that the problem in Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, climate, water, air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness of its leaders to take up the challenge of being an example in their leadership role. In the words of Anazodo, Ibeto and Nkah (2015:45-6):

> Leadership holds the key to unlocking the transformation questions in Nigeria, but to sustain this drive, leaders must carry certain genes and attribute that are representative and promotive of this order. These include: (a). The existence of practical, purposeful, visionary and mission initiative by the individual, reflecting the objectives of held ideas, values and aspirations, (b). The existence in an individual of a clear set of ideas, values, aspirations reflecting those of the majority who are the subject or followership, and (c). The existence of patriotic and nationalistic spirit, and transparency and accountability, signs of concrete achievements involving the extent to which intended effects are produced by the leaders. These are the core values of good governances.

4.4. Application of the parable of the shrewd steward

The intention here is not to repeat what has been said thus far in relation to wealth and possessions in Luke (see 3.4.1), but to attempt to apply this, as well as Luke's teaching on the kingdom of God and eschatology (3.4.1.3), to Nigeria and the southern Kaduna state in particular, where corruption, as observed in 4.1, is an enormous problem.

Achebe, as discussed above (4.3), has pointed out that the biggest problem in Nigeria is that of leadership with regard to its natural resources. In view of this, the application (appropriation) of this parable to Nigerian society is justified, since it presents an important aspect of the Gospel of Luke's ethics on the proper use of wealth and possessions for the sake of the poor in his own community. Reading the parable within its immediate and broader literary context has indeed provided us with vital information on how to be faithful stewards (2.2). To be a faithful steward is to keep the coming judgement of God and the needs of the poor in view. It is clear that the Lukan Jesus is not encouraging dishonesty, but rather the way the steward in Luke

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16:1-9 acted in his moment of crisis in preparing for his future by relieving the poor of their debt burden. These two aspects – responding appropriately to the coming judgement and doing so in particular to the use of possessions for the poor (3.5) – cannot be separated from each other in Luke. Luke, in other words, is not just emphasising a general urgency in view of the coming judgement. He is also stressing care for the poor.

This message is indeed applicable to the Nigerian society, where there are both faithful and unfaithful rich people. Christians in Nigerian society should note the way Luke challenged the rich in his community to manage their resources for the care of the poor. Luke 16:9, for example, gives a clear picture of how the action of the steward played a concrete role in alleviating the burden of the master's debtors. From the perspective of the Gospel of Luke's concern for the poor (3.4.1), this should not just be considered to be a fictive illustration. But, just like the parable of the sower does not teach us a farming practice to follow, or the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1-16) does not teach us how to pay workers, but rather how to respond to the coming Kingdom of God, the parable of the shrewd steward does not prescribe a management or accounting practice for our time. It intends rather to teach us how to live in the light of the coming Kingdom of God. We should focus on the needs of the poor. Nigerian society, which has a lot in common with the context of the Lukan Gospel in terms of its high rate of poverty caused by corruption, should thus be challenged by the shrewdness of the steward and use their wealth and possessions wisely for the benefit of the poor in their society.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter has considered African (Nigerian) interpretations of the parable of the shrewd steward and the problems of contemporary Nigerian society. It has also attempted to provide the hermeneutical key for unlocking the meaning of this parable for Nigeria. The study now turns to the last chapter for a summary, conclusion and recommendations.

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Chapter 5
Summary and Conclusion

5.1.Summary

This research is an evaluation of the parable of the shrewd steward (Luke 16:1-9). The primary research problem posed in Chapter One is that of understanding the role of a steward in the parable, which has been problematic throughout its interpretive history (1.3). The main problem in the parable is Jesus' praise and commendation of the unfaithful steward (1.1). In Nigeria, if not in most African societies, where there is need of faithful stewards, one is left confused about how to understand that a master praises the dishonest act of his steward in a context in which corruption has become a way of life.

The study proceeds in Chapter One from the assumption that, among the genres used by Jesus during his earthly ministry, the most familiar and striking are the parables, which cover one third of Jesus' teaching. The importance of these parables in terms of shedding light on Jesus' history, ethics and even his self-understanding cannot be overemphasised. At the same time, the parables challenge and disturb their readers because, even with their superficial simplicity, they convey key insights into the nature of the Kingdom of God. In this study, the parables are understood in line with the meaning of the Hebrew *Mashal* and the Greek *parabole*, as referring to a proverb, a riddle or a metaphor used to convince and persuade hearers (1.2.1). The methodology to be used for answering the research questions (1.3) was also introduced (1.2.2).

In Chapter Two, the problem posed by the parable was explained before the literary context of the parable was examined (2.2), as well as the demarcation of the parable itself (2.3). The discussion in the chapter suggested that, even if the parable told by Jesus may have ended in v. 8a. Luke had added a number of sayings that reveal his understanding of the parable as being about the correct use of wealth and possessions in the light of the coming kingdom of God. An annotated translation of Luke 16:1-9 was also given (2.4).

In Chapter Three the social context of the parable was surveyed (3.2), before the parable itself was analysed by using a social scientific method in order to understand the text in terms of its social context (3.3). The parable was read verse by verse. In this chapter the function of

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stewards in the first century was clarified. A steward was an estate manager, a position of a considerable authority and trust. The steward in the parable under consideration was a responsible agent to whom the absentee master had entrusted a great deal. It thus is clear that a steward like the one in Luke 16 was highly placed in the household bureaucracy of the rich and powerful elite. The theological perspective of the text in question was also brought to light. The words of Jesus in v. 9, on the use of worldly riches to make friends (3.3.7), necessitated considering the Lukan concept of wealth and possession and the coming Kingdom of God (3.4.1.2). It was argued that, in this parable (3.4.1.1), Luke intended to criticise the wrong use of wealth and possessions, which was a way of life for some in his community. The social system suggested in the text was also looked at in terms of key values in the first-century world (3.2). The values considered were honour and shame, patron-client benefaction, hospitality and the economic situation in the first century.

In Chapter Four, the focus was on the application of the text in question to the contemporary Nigeria and southern Kaduna in particular, where the understanding and interpretation of the text in terms of proper stewardship of possession is especially challenging (4.3). The study revealed that African scholars, like scholars on other continent, are also struggling with the interpretative problems posed by the parable under consideration (4.2). The African scholars also agreed with their counterparts from other continents that the focus of the parable is not on the dishonest acts of the steward, but on his shrewdness. They also suggest a possible interpretation of the parable based on its immediate and broader literary context.

5.2.Conclusion

In Chapter One (1.3), the primary research question in this study was stated as *Why is the dishonest steward praised in Luke 16:1-9 and can a social-scientific study of the parable of the dishonest steward result in a better understanding thereof?* The question was asked because Africa needs faithful stewards and not corrupt ones, as the steward in the parable in question is depicted as being. The study, as summarised in 5.1, has attempted to answer this question. It has concluded that the master's praise for the dishonest steward was not for his dishonest act, but for his shrewdness in using his time of crisis to prepare for the coming judgement. A social-scientific reading of the parable in its context thus did not find a reason for understanding the way the steward acted as being commendable in his time. It rather emphasised the disgraceful

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nature thereof further. The steward had not only squandered his master's money. He had also challenged his honour. In the first century the latter would have been considered the more serious transgression of the two.

despite his despicable conduct, however, Jesus, in Luke, commends him because he had not only understood the seriousness of his situation and acted appropriately, but had also alleviated the plight of the poor. For this reason, he is praised by his master and held up as an example by Luke. It is thus this aspect of his conduct that should be emulated today, especially in African society and in Nigeria and particular the church. African (Nigeria) leaders and Christians, should take note of the nearness of the Kingdom of God and the coming judgement, and use the wealth and possessions that have been entrusted to them to care for the poor.

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