



## Things

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### Quick Links to the Study

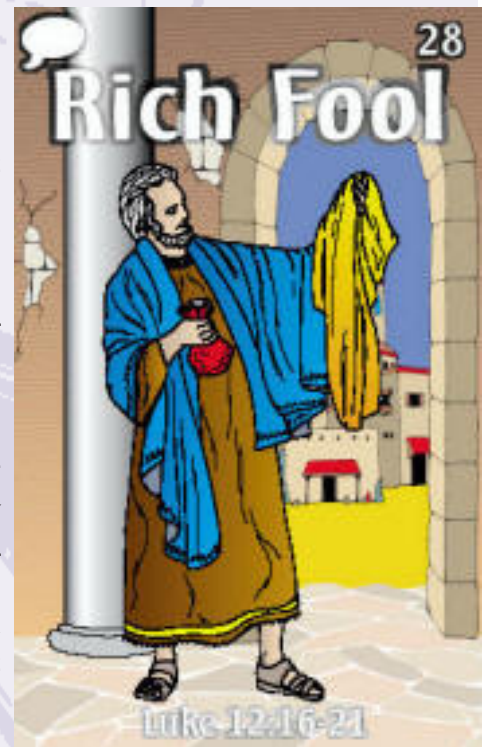
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IN LUKE'S PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL WE ARE CONFRONTED FACE TO FACE WITH THE CORRUPTING INFLUENCE OF WEALTH AND THE AMERICAN PASSION FOR ACCUMULATING THINGS. WHETHER WE ACKNOWLEDGE IT OR NOT, THERE'S SOME DEGREE OF THE RICH FOOL IN EVERY ONE OF US WHO LIVE IN AMERICAN CULTURE. THE MATERIALISTIC CULTURE THAT SATURATES AMERICAN LIFE IMPACTS EVERY PERSON IN THAT CULTURE, CHRISTIAN OR NOT.

THE BIBLICAL STORY BUILDS OFF LEGITIMATE MATERIAL CONCERN, AN INHERITANCE AND THE JUST DISPOSITION OF THE DEAD FATHER'S WEALTH. BUT JESUS SAW IN THE REQUEST TO ARBITRATE THE SETTLEMENT SOMETHING VERY TROUBLING. THE INDIVIDUAL MAKING THE REQUEST WAS FOCUSED ON ACQUIRING THINGS, EVEN THOUGH THEY WERE HIS FATHER'S THINGS. THE PERCEIVED WRONGFUL DISTRIBUTION IMPOSED BY THE (OLDER -- MOST LIKELY) BROTHER WAS THE LEGITIMIZING OF THE QUEST FOR THINGS. WE ARE ALL LIKE THAT. AS CHRISTIANS WE CAN'T BE SO BRASH TO DISPLAY RAW, CRASS MATERIALISM. IT NEEDS A JUST CAUSE SO IT CAN BE LEGITIMATE. USUALLY WE SCRATCH AROUND UNTIL SOME SUCH "JUST CAUSE" CAN BE TURNED UP. THEN OUR QUEST FOR THINGS BECOMES SOCIALLY AND OUTWARDLY JUSTIFIABLE RELIGIOUSLY.

BUT JESUS' PARABLE IN LUKE 12 BUTT HEADS WITH SUCH QUESTS AND DEMANDS A DIFFERENT APPROACH FOR THOSE WHO WOULD BE HIS DISCIPLES.



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### I. Context

As is typical, we will draw upon [previous studies](#) in Luke's gospel for the background material. New material will be developed to supplement this earlier material.

#### a. Historical

**External History.** Regarding the compositional history of the Gospel of Luke, let me summarize a

lot of Lukan scholarship by the following. William Beard in the *Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible* (iPreach online) summarizes the basic issue this way:

According to tradition this gospel was written by Luke, "the beloved physician" and travel companion of Paul (Col. 4:14; Philemon 1:24; 2 Tim. 4:11). Actually the tradition is not very old. It appears first in the writings of Irenaeus, who was a theologian living in Gaul during the latter part of the 2nd cent. The Muratorian fragment (ca. A.D. 200), a document which presents an official list of Christian scriptures, supports the same conclusion.

With the acceptance of this early church tradition -- although not all do and since the gospel itself makes no effort internally to identify its author -- then the issue becomes trying to locate a setting for the writing of this gospel. Again Prof. Beard summarizes quite effectively these questions:

The exact date and place of the writing of this gospel cannot be ascertained. Since the author uses Mark as a source and since he seems to have accurate knowledge of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (19:41-44; 21:20-24; see pp. 1029-31) he evidently wrote after A.D. 70. He must have written before 140, when his gospel was included in the canon of the heretic Marcion. Since the situation of the church reflected in the gospel fits well the political situation of the reign of the Emperor Domitian (81-96), a date from about 85 to 95 is most likely.

According to one tradition Luke wrote his histories in Rome. Another locates his writing in Greece. Since there is a correlative tradition that the evangelist died in one of the Greek provinces, this latter tradition has better support. Any of these locations assumes the traditional authorship and bears the same burdens. Perhaps all we can say is that the gospel was written from some locale where Greek was the primary language and where cultured readers like Theophilus (1:3) would be at home.

According to [Luke 1:1-4](#), this gospel -- and subsequently the book of Acts (cf. Acts 1:1) -- were dedicated to a [Theophilus](#) who as a patron supported the cost of producing these documents as well as the making of copies of them for distribution to various Christian communities in the late first century world. Evidently Theophilus was a wealthy Roman who had become a Christian and wanted to contribute to the spread of Christianity by supporting Luke's writing of these two documents. The gospel preface ([Lk 1:4](#)) suggests the purpose of the document was "so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which



you have been instructed" (ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν).

The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts together stand as a two volume testimony to the beginning of the Christian religion with its founder, Jesus Christ, and the first three decades of the beginning of this movement in its spread from Jerusalem to Rome from AD 30 to AD 61. The author was closely associated with the apostle Paul. For the gospel account Luke made use of a variety of sources, as he indicated in [Lk 1:1-3](#), since he was not personally present with Jesus during

his earthly ministry. Modern scholarship generally concludes that among these sources are the gospels of Mark and perhaps also Matthew, although more likely the material in Luke, that is also found in Matthew, may very well be drawn from a common, unknown source. That is generally called the Q document from the German word Quelle meaning source. Thus with at least Mark and Q in front of him, along with notes from interviews with various people around the earthly Jesus, Luke set out to tell his story of Jesus in a way that would enhance understanding of the enormous significance of this Jewish carpenter from the little village of Nazareth in the northern Palestinian province of Galilee. As best as we can determine, this happened sometime in the 70s or perhaps early 80s of the first Christian century, possibly while Luke was living in Rome. Or, perhaps not too many years after Luke had migrated eastward out of Rome once Paul had been executed by Nero in the mid-60s.

**Internal History.** The time and place markers inside the passage are limited. And they occur at two levels: 1) those having to do with the historical setting of this episode; and 2) those inside the parable dealing with the first century Jewish setting of agricultural practices of harvesting and storing the wheat and barley from the harvest, along with agriculturally based wealth in Palestine.

Regarding the historical setting of the episode, only one indicator surfaces: someone from a crowd of people with Jesus made a request to Jesus. We are told nothing beyond this vague reference about where this took place, when it happened etc. For further insight one must turn to the surrounding passages for possible signals of time and place. But, as is addressed below under Literary Context, 12:13-21 is but one of several stories that Luke has collected about Jesus and is inserted here largely

for illustrating Jesus' understanding of various topics rather than being a historical indication of time and place occurrence.

The reference to the crowd in verse 13 seems to allude back to the crowd reference in verse 1 (NRSV): "Meanwhile, when the crowd gathered by the thousands, so that they trampled on one another, he began to speak first to his disciples,..." The allusion to this crowd of people seems to undergird the next several episodes down to 13:10 where a location shift takes place (NRSV): "Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath." Luke 13:22 provides a general setting for all this material (NRSV): "Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem."

Thus this general conclusion can be reached with some certainty: this episode took place in Jesus' ministry somewhere between the end of his ministry in Galilee



in northern Palestine and his arrival in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration in southern Palestine. That would place it sometime in late winter / early spring of AD 30.

The events described in chapters 12 and 13 of Luke are also positioned as an offshoot of Jesus having eaten dinner in the house of a Pharisee as described in 11:37-52. This is then marked by the statement in 11:53-54 (NRSV): "53 When he went outside, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile toward him and to cross-examine him about many things, 54 lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say."

Regarding the historical setting of Jewish agricultural practices inside the parable, the details of this tradition will be treated in the exegesis of the passage. They form the essential historical key to correct understanding of the parable.

## b. Literary

**Genre.** Multiple elements of literary pattern are contained in 12:13-21. As a whole, the pericope constitutes an episodic narrative depicting an event that took place on one particular occasion. Some will see the entire pericope, or more often, vv. 13-15, as taking on the form of a Pronouncement Story (e.g., John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary*). Typically such ancient stories were episodic narratives in a dialogical pattern of conversation between Jesus and an individual or group of people such as the Pharisees. Normally the conversation is hostile rather than friendly. What the other person says and/or does provides Jesus with the opportunity to make a pronouncement of timeless spiritual truth as the highlight of his response to the other party. 12:13-21 bears some of these marks but they are not so well structured as in most of the Pronouncement Stories in the synoptic gospels. D.L. Harmann ("Sayings of Jesus, Forms of," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, iPreach) provides this helpful analysis:

Some of the sayings are placed in brief scenes, where a question, either from Jesus' disciples or his opponents, or the conduct of Jesus or of his disciples, occasions a question which the saying of Jesus then answers. This corresponds to the "apophthegm" form familiar from Greek literature; the classification of such material as "pronouncement story" expresses more emphatically the fact that Jesus is here portrayed more as a preacher than as a teacher.

Embedded inside the pericope and as a part of Jesus' response to the request about inheritance is both an axiom and a parable.

The axiomatic saying is in verse 15: "one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Such principle oriented sayings are a major element in the synoptic gospel record of what Jesus taught during his public ministry. This stands in the OT Jewish Wisdom Saying as found in the Psalms and Proverbs. Some indication in the awkwardness of the Greek sentence suggests that this sentence may represent Luke bringing together two elements of Jesus tradition into a single statement. The [Block Diagram](#) of the Greek text highlights the awkwardness of the sentence, which is almost always smoothed out in English translations. Literally the statement reads "because not in the to abundantly possess some things is one's life out of what is being possessed by him":

ὅτι οὐκ... ἢ ζωὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν  
ἐν τῷ περισσεύειν τινὶ  
ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ

The two modifiers -- infinitive and prepositional phrases -- are redundant and rather clumsily put together. To most commentators this signals Luke's use of existing tradition and an effort to combine two pieces of that tradition. Whether this is correct or not, the net effect is a timeless saying about where the core definition of life can **not** be found.

The parable, vv. 16-21, forms the heart of Jesus' response to the request. This particular parable stands as a Narrative Parable in the Contrast Parables group that have apocalyptic overtones. (See my [Guidelines for Exegeting Parables](#) at Cranfordville

for details.) All of this to assert that the Kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching includes divine accountability and eternal judgment by God Himself. To preoccupy oneself with things in this life is to jeopardize one's eternal destiny.

The story grows out of the agriculturally oriented society of first century Palestine. Wealth in general for Jews at that time and in that particular part of the Mediterranean world was based on agriculture more than anything else. In Diaspora Judaism outside of Palestine, wealth could, for instance, also be grounded in one's successful operation of a business, especially as a merchant -- that which provided most Jewish wealth in the Diaspora of this era.

**Literary Context.** The literary setting of 12:13-21 is easy to determine. This pericope is surrounded by a collection of stories in Luke's gospel found in [9:57 through 13:21](#).

- 67. Conversation with would-be follower 9:57-62
- 68. Seventy sent out 10:1-16
- 69. Seventy returned 10:17-20
- 70. Jesus' thanksgiving 10:21-24
- 71. Parable of the Blue Samaritan 10:25-37
- 72. Visit to Martha and Mary 10:38-42
- 73. Teaching on prayer 11:1-13
- 74. Beelzebub accusation 11:14-26

- 75. True blessedness 11:27-28
- 76. Demand for a sign 11:29-32
- 77. Light and darkness 11:33-36
- 78. Denouncing the Pharisees 11:37-54
- 79. Fearless confession 12:1-12
- 80. **Parable of the rich fool 12:13-21**
- 81. Earthly possessions and Heavenly treasure 12:22-34
- 82. Watching for the return of the Son of Man 12:35-48
- 83. The coming crisis 12:49-59
- 84. Need for repentance 13:1-9
- 85. Crippled woman healed 13:10-17
- 86. Parable of the mustard seed 13:18-19
- 87. Parable of the leaven 13:20-21

These stories form part of the so-called [Travelogue](#) narrative in Luke's Gospel in 9:51-18:14. Luke places these stories between Jesus' final departure from Galilee and his arrival in Jerusalem for the Passover in the spring of AD 30. Almost none of this material has parallels in either Matthew or Mark, meaning that Luke is drawing upon sources different from either Mark or the Q document. The evident purpose of including this material is to provide the reader with insights into Jesus' teaching on a variety of topics not directly addressed in other stories about His actions and words. Thus we learn much about Jesus from this material that we would not otherwise know.

## II. Message

**Literary Structure.** The internal thought flow of 12:13-21 is simple. An individual makes a request of Jesus (v. 13) and Jesus responds to it (vv. 14-21). The [Block](#) and [Semantic](#) diagrams, as summarized in the [Summary of Rhetorical Structure](#) section, clearly illustrate this structure. This will provide the organizing structure for our discussion of the passage.

### a. A Request, v. 13

Greek NT	NASB	NRSV	NLT
12.13 Εἶπεν δὲ τι, ἐκ τοῦ ὄχλου αὐτῷ, Διδάσκαλε, εἰπὲ τῷ ἀδελφῷ μου μερίσασθαι μετ' ἐμοῦ τὴν κληρονομίαν.	13 Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."	13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."	13 Then someone called from the crowd, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me."

#### Notes:

The request made to Jesus is couched in very simple terms, and reflects Jewish traditions of the first Christian century. In a crowd of people gathered to listen to Jesus teach, an individual verbalizes a request that was typically made to Jewish scribes / rabbis of the beginning Christian century.

The exact location and time of this gathering is left undefined by Luke, as discussed above under [Internal History](#). About as close as we can come to locating the event is that it took place sometime

between Jesus' departure from Galilee as he headed to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration of AD 30. Since Luke's narrative allows for a much longer period than does Mark and Matthew at this point, the event could easily have taken place somewhere in Judea during that period.

Not even the individual is identified by Luke, since for him this detail is not significant to the story. All we know about the man was that his father had died and his older brother, who had taken charge of

his father's estate, was not sharing the inheritance with the other children. At least, not according to this son's understanding of the guidelines for inheritance division in the Jewish Torah, the Law of God. Thus the man turned to one perceived to be an expert in that Law, Jesus, to give his brother the correct interpretation of the Law and thus help force his brother to more appropriately divide up his father's wealth.

To request a religious teacher to settle a legal dispute on a civil law issue presents a custom and tradition radically different from anything remotely resembling American legal tradition. Thus deeper understanding of this ancient Jewish practice becomes necessary for better interpretation of the passage.

First, the matter of inheriting property in ancient Judaism needs to be addressed.



In the U.S. legal system, how a person's property is to be distributed at his or her death ideally is determined by a legal document called a will, which the individual has set up with the help of an attorney. At the person's death, the individual named as the executor of the will takes the leadership in having the

will probated through the court. This formal process helps guarantee that the provisions contained in the will are properly carried out. The key here is the will. If the individual has not provided a will, then most states in our country have laws defining in general terms how an estate is to be distributed. While a more complex procedure, these state laws do, however, attempt to make an equitable distribution of the property to the legal heirs of the individual.



In ancient Judaism, the dynamic was radically different. The legal system bore little resemblance to a modern American system. The customs about who got what were generally defined in the legal codes of the Old Testament Law. These had been interpreted and expanded over time through scribal interpretative tradition.

Looking at the terminus of this tradition at the time of the New Testament writings, the idea of inheritance in the NT mainly revolves around a word group that includes the verb κληρονομέω (I inherit), a

personal noun κληρονόμος, ὁ (heir), and an abstract noun κληρονομία, ἡ (inheritance). Beyond these one finds συνκληρονόμος, ὁ (fellow-heir; joint-heir) and κατακληρονομέω (I give in possession).

The usage of this word group in the New Testament does on occasion allude to property distribution, but more often the concept is extended figuratively to refer to spiritual inheritance. Note W. Forester's description ("kleros et als," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Kittel, Logos Systems) of the literal reference of the words:

1. *The Usage.* κληρονόμος means "heir" in Mk. 12:7, "heir" religiously in Gal. 4:1; Rom. 8:17, and "recipient" of the divine promises in Rom. 4:13-14; Tit. 3:7; Heb. 6:17; Jms. 2:5. συνκληρονόμος occurs for "fellow heir" in Rom. 8:17; Heb. 11:9; 1 Pet. 3:7; Eph. 3:6. κληρονομέω means "to inherit" in Gal. 4:30; Heb. 1:4 (Christ) and "to receive" God's gifts or promises in Mt. 5:5; 19:29; Lk. 10:25; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21; Heb. 1:14; 6:12. κατακληρονομέω means "to give in possession" (Acts 13:9). κληρονομία means "inheritance" in Mk. 12:7 and Gal. 3:18, "possession" in Acts 7:5; Heb. 11:8, and "eternal inheritance" in Acts 20:32; Eph. 1:4, 18; Col. 3:24; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 1:4.

The usage of these terms in their literal meaning as described above provide little insight into legal guidelines and practices that were followed. The NT usage assumes traditional Jewish practices at the beginning of the Christian era, but doesn't spell out these with details.

Thus, the Jewish practices of the first century have to be studied in order to gain understanding. The difficulty here is one of primary sources. To be certain, these customs have their roots in the OT legal code, but centuries of interpretive tradition typically extend and/or modify the legal codes in the OT Law. How these OT codes were interpreted in the first Christian century by Jews could be -- and often was -- very different from how they had been understood at various times in the OT era.

Thus just quoting the OT texts in the Pentateuch as the definition of Jewish inheritance customs in the first Christian century is not only inaccurate but a distortion of the first century Jewish tradition. The basic written source for first century Judaism is the Talmud, but it did not take written form until the 300s





AD and later. The scholar faces a huge obstacle in deciding which of the accumulated material over the five or so centuries contained in the [Talmud](#) relates to the first Christian century. Thus, most of the details of functioning Judaism in the first Christian century represent an educated guess based upon later documented sources. This is our challenge and these limits must frame any conclusions reached about details.

The OT texts link inheritance primarily to land, and in particular to the portion of the Promised Land allotted to individual clans and then to particular families inside the clan. J. Herrmann (Kittel's TDNT, vol. 3, pp. 769-776) summarizes the OT perspective this way:

- a. The references show that the Hebrew terms denote allotment, and possession only on this basis. They thus express the element of divine ordination.
- b. The sense of apportionment is also present. Tribes, families, and individuals have their own shares by sacred lot, and hence also by divine appointment.
- c. The basic concept is that of possession of land, and the law takes various steps to safeguard this (Ex. 20:17; Lev. 20:5; cf. Is. 5:8; Mic. 2:2).
- d. Since God promised the land to the patriarchs, it could be called an inheritance even though it was not possessed or handed down, but given by God at the conquest. The individual portions then become inheritances, as in the case of Naboth in 1 Kgs. 21:3. While an inheritance may embrace goods, it consists primarily of land (Num. 27:1ff.; Ruth 4:5ff.).
- e. The above developments explain why Israel may be called God's portion and heritage.
- f. They also explain the use for destiny as one's "lot" — a lot which may be

equated with God himself (Ps. 16:5-6).

Implied in this are several considerations. Ancient Israelites did not "make out a will" in order to specify the division of property. As 2 Sam. 17:13; 2 King. 10:1; and Isa. 38:1 suggest, the father "set his house in order" toward the end of his life by issuing verbal instructions about apportionment of the property at his death. But this division of property had to conform to set guidelines laid down in the Torah. Deut. 21:15-17 illustrates one of the principles regarding division of property for sons of two wives. Numbers 27:1-11 deals with daughters inheriting their father's property when he had no son. This brings up the point that inheritance passed from father to son(s), but not to daughters when sons existed. The firstborn son was to receive a double portion of the father's inheritance according to Deut. 21:17. Roland de Vaux ([Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions](#), p. 53) surmises that "probably only the movable chattels were shared, and the house, with the ancestral holdings, would be allotted to the eldest, or at least not divided. This would keep the family property intact, and might explain the text of Dt 25:5 about brothers who 'live together'."

From these very generalized depictions we can better understand the probable situation behind the issue posed to Jesus: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." In some way the OT guidelines were not being followed, or, at least this son didn't think so. Exactly what the brother had done with his father's property isn't spelled out. No

division may have been made. The brother may not have given his brother the appropriate third of the father's property. Or something else.

Second, how could a religious teacher appropriately and legally resolve a civil law dispute? Here is where the cultural differences between then and now take a huge leap. The man's request, if put forth in our day, would have to be done to a judge in a legal court setting. Darrell Bock (*Luke Volume 2: 9:51-24:53, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 1149, Logos Systems) observes:

The request comes from someone in the crowd. Jesus is addressed as teacher (διδάσκαλε, didaskale), a title that shows people view him as a respected rabbi. A rabbi would often settle such disputes about inheritance because the regulations on them appear in the Pentateuch and the rabbi interpreted Torah (Deut. 21:15-17; Num. 27:1-11; 36:7-9; m. B. Bat. 8-9; Fitzmyer 1985: 969; Wiefel 1988: 236; SB 3:545).

As experts in interpreting the legal code of the Old Testament the rabbis could render an "expert" opinion on how specific OT laws applied to this situation. This would put tremendous pressure on the brother to re-define his apportionment of the father's inheritance in order to bring them into conformity with God's Law. Thus the issue was both legal and religious at the same time.

The addressing of Jesus as "Teacher" implies the individual viewed Jesus as a trusted rabbi who

would know the Law and how to apply it to his situation.

But careful consideration of the wording of the request (εἰπέ τῷ ἀδελφῷ μου μερίσασθαι μετ' ἐμοῦ τὴν κληρονομίαν) can suggest the conclusion of Alfred Plummer (*Luke*, in the *International Critical Commentary*, Logos Systems): "He does not ask Jesus to arbitrate between him and his brother, but to give a decision against his brother." If this is a correct reading, it may further explain the abruptness of Jesus' initial response in verse 14.

In seeking to compare ourselves to this individual, what should we do in the settlement of an inheritance, especially when a dispute over the terms is underway? Because so little about the individual and his motives behind the request is provided, we should be cautious about seeing too much here. One positive thing can be gleaned; the man attempted to follow correct procedure in seeking a solution to his problem. He didn't resort to violence or illegal actions in seeking what he perceived as rightfully belonging to him. Although what was appropriate procedure for him would be radically different for us, we can see in his action a respect for the Law of God and an appeal to it for resolution of his problem. In that stands a worth while example. As Christians we must seek God's leadership in our quest for just settlement.

### b. Jesus' Response, vv. 14-21

Greek NT	NASB	NRSV	NLT
12.14 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Ἄνθρωπε, τίς με κατέστησεν κριτὴν ἢ μεριστὴν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς; 12.15 εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς, Ὁρᾶτε καὶ φυλάσσεσθε ἀπὸ πάσης πλεονεξίας, ὅτι οὐκ ἐν τῷ περισεύειν τινὶ ἡ ζωὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ. 12.16 Εἶπεν δὲ παραβολὴν πρὸς αὐτούς λέγων, Ἀνθρώπου τινὸς πλουσίου εὐφόρησεν ἡ χώρα. 12.17 καὶ διελογίζετο ἐν ἑαυτῷ λέγων, Τί ποιήσω, ὅτι οὐκ ἔχω ποῦ συνάξω τοὺς καρπούς μου; 12.18 καὶ εἶπεν, Τοῦτο ποιήσω, καθελῶ μου τὰς ἀποθήκας καὶ	14 But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." 16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' 18 "Then he	14 But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." 16 Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" 18 Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and	14 Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?" 15 Then he said, "Beware! Don't be greedy for what you don't have. Real life is not measured by how much we own." 16 And he gave an illustration: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. 17 In fact, his barns were full to overflowing. 18 So he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store everything. 19 And I'll

μείζονα, οικοδομήσω καὶ  
συνάξω ἐκεῖ πάντα τὸν  
σίτον καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ μου  
12.19 καὶ ἐρῶ τῆς ψυχῆς  
μου, Ψυχὴ, ἔχεις πολλὰ  
ἀγαθὰ κείμενα εἰ, ἔτι  
πολλὰ ἀναπαύου, φάγε,  
πίε, εὐφραίνου. 12.20  
εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ θεός,  
"Ἄφρων, ταύτη τῇ νυκτὶ  
τὴν ψυχὴν σου ἀπαιτοῦσιν  
ἀπὸ σοῦ· ἃ δὲ ἠτοίμασας,  
τίτι ἔσται; 12.21 οὕτως ὁ  
θησαυρίζων ἑαυτῷ καὶ μὴ  
εἰς θεὸν πλουτῶν.

said, "This is what I will  
do: I will tear down my  
barns and build larger  
ones, and there I will  
store all my grain and  
my goods. 19 "And I will  
say to my soul, "Soul,  
you have many goods  
laid up for many years  
to come; take your ease,  
eat, drink and be merry."  
20 But God said to him,  
"You fool! This very night  
your soul is required  
of you; and now who  
will own what you have  
prepared?" 21 So is the  
man who stores up trea-  
sure for himself, and is  
not rich toward God."

build larger ones, and  
there I will store all my  
grain and my goods. 19  
And I will say to my soul,  
Soul, you have ample  
goods laid up for many  
years; relax, eat, drink,  
be merry.' 20 But God  
said to him, "You fool!  
This very night your life  
is being demanded of  
you. And the things you  
have prepared, whose  
will they be?' 21 So it  
is with those who store  
up treasures for them-  
selves but are not rich  
toward God."

sit back and say to my-  
self, My friend, you have  
enough stored away for  
years to come. Now  
take it easy! Eat, drink,  
and be merry!' 20 "But  
God said to him, 'You  
fool! You will die this  
very night. Then who  
will get it all?' 21 "Yes, a  
person is a fool to store  
up earthly wealth but  
not have a rich relation-  
ship with God."

#### Notes:

The nature of Jesus' response has occasioned considerable discussion. As the passage stands, his response is set forth in a three fold manner. First, he disavows any desire to arbitrate legal disputes (v. 14). Second, he issues a warning about greed (v. 15). Third, he tells a parable about the rich fool (vv. 16-21). Verse 21 may or may not have been a part of the story about the rich man, since it serves only to apply the point of the parable to Jesus' audience.

The shift from inheritance to greed in v. 15 has prompted some to see two separate and rather unrelated issues on the table in vv. 13-21. Yet, in my opinion most of this uncertainty reflects a modern mind assuming (falsely, I might add) that Jesus' mind would have followed modern patterns of thought development and flow. When the text doesn't go a modern direction, the conclusion is reached that the topics have little connection to one another. But this way of thinking reflects modern western arrogance more than honest inquiry into the text. Even modern life experience unquestionably illustrates the profound connection between inheriting property and materialistic greed. Anyone having gone through the probation of a will dealing with substantial sums of wealth knows exactly what the text is getting at. Such moments inevitably bring out the dark side of at least some family members. "Poor old, beloved daddy **must** have wanted me to have more than this measly sum!"

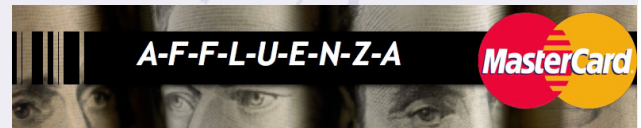
Although "seams" in Luke's use of sources ap-

pear, one can clearly conclude that Luke's understanding of Jesus' teaching on this matter followed the three-fold pattern as set forth in vv. 14-21. And as such provides us with the "mind of Jesus" on this matter.

**Disavowal of legal responsibility, v. 14.** The first reaction of Jesus to the man's request seems a bit abrupt: "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" ("Ἀνθρωπε, τίς με κατέστησεν κριτὴν ἢ μεριστὴν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς;). The obvious answer assumed here is "No one did."

John Nolland (*Word Biblical Commentary*, Logos Systems) provides helpful insight here:

The address, "man," is forceful, but need not be insulting (cf. 5:20; 22:58, 60). The reply echoes in an inverted manner wording from Exod 2:14 (cf. Acts 7:27, 35). "Divider" is not a separate designation but only a particular function of a judge. While "judge" comes from Exod 2:14, "divider" appears here because of the particular request addressed to Jesus. Is Jesus rejecting a role as second Moses (as Leaney, 199)? Is he identifying a fundamental difference between his own role and that of Moses (as Maier, TB 5 [1974] 151-54)? Or is there an irony involved here, based on a view that the person appealing wants to make use for his own ends of a perceived status and authority in Jesus without facing the claim upon his own life implicit in that status and authority? (While it did not suit the protagonists in Exod 2:14 to have Moses intervene and intervention did suit in the Gospel episode, in neither case is there a proper recognition of the role of the intervening/called-upon-to-intervene figure.) The last of the three options identified





is the most likely. The allusion suggests that the logic of the man's request should press him to discipleship and so to the values promulgated by this new "Mosaic" figure (cf. Deut 18:18–19).

**Warning against greed, v. 15.** Although the English translation obscures it, Jesus addresses the crowd in verse 15, not just the man making the request. The Greek text makes this very clear by using the second person plural form of the two verbs: *Ορᾶτε καὶ φυλάσσεσθε ἀπὸ πάσης πλεονεξίας, ὅτι οὐκ ἐν τῷ περισσεύειν τινὶ ἡ ζωὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ* ("Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."). Two commands are given which are grounded in a timeless truth about the nature of life.

The comments of Darrell Bock (*Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Logos Systems) are helpful:

Jesus adds a warning about excessive focus on possessions. The warning is given to all, not just to the man (so πρὸς αὐτούς, pros autous, to them). Disciples are broadly warned to "be on their guard" (φυλάσσω, *phyllassō*; Bertram, TDNT 9:240 §C1), not just against money but all forms of greed, of "the desire to have more," which is what πλεονεξία (*pleonexia*; BAGD 667; BAA 1342–43) means. Greed receives mention because it can fuel disagreement and disharmony. The danger of the pursuit of possessions is that it can make one insensitive to people. Greed can create a distortion about what life is, because the definition of life is not found in objects, but relationships, especially to God and his will.<sup>7</sup> To define life in terms of things is the ultimate reversal of the creature serving the creation and ignoring the Creator (Rom. 1:18–32). In Col. 3:5 and Eph. 5:5, greed is called idolatry because it tends to become a god that drives one to do things that are not good (Liefeld 1984: 961). (How often are modern disputes over estates motivated by the same idolatry?) Jesus will tell a parable to illustrate just how foolish this position is. Real life, he argues, possesses a far different focus. Real life is tied to God, his offer of forgiveness of sins, his values, and his reward (T. Schmidt 1987: 146, noting Derrett 1977b). It is being faithful in response to God's goodness. Real life, which is truly rich, is rich toward God, not things (Luke 12:21; Marshall 1978: 523).

**The parable of the rich fool, vv. 16-20.** The heart of Jesus' response comes in the narrative parable that Jesus told the crowd. The core structure of the story revolves around a wealthy man making plans for himself and God condemning those plans with a reminder of the nature of life:

1. The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" 2. Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and

there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'

3. But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

Fred Craddock (*Interpretation: a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Logos Systems) provides these helpful observations about the parable:

The parable calls covetousness folly. It could also have said it was a violation of the law of Moses (Ex. 20:17) and of the teachings of the prophets (Micah 2:2). Even so, it seems to have been a widespread problem in the church (Rom. 1:29; Mark 7:22; Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5; I Tim. 6:10). This craving to hoard not only puts goods in the place of God (in Pauline theology, covetousness is idolatry, Rom. 1:25; Col. 3:5) but is an act of total disregard for the needs of others. The preacher will want to be careful not to caricature the farmer and thus rob the story of the power of its realism. There is nothing here of graft or theft; there is no mistreatment of workers or any criminal act. Sun, soil, and rain join to make him wealthy. He is careful and conservative. If he is not unjust, then what is he? He is a fool, says the parable. He lives completely for himself, he talks to himself, he plans for himself, he congratulates himself. His sudden death proves him to have lived as a fool. "For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" (9:25).

We have known since Mary sang of the reversal of fortunes of the full and the empty (1:53) that Luke would again and again raise the seductive and difficult subject of possessions. He will hold up as the standard for disciples the voluntary sharing of one's goods. This, says Luke, was the message of John the Baptist (3:10–14) and of Jesus (6:30; 16:19–31) and was the practice of early Christians (Acts 4:34–37).

The point of the parable is reached in God's words to the rich man. Just as Jesus' timeless truth in v. 15 claimed, one's life isn't made up of what is possessed. Life is far deeper than that. This wealthy man didn't realize it and thus is declared a fool by God Himself.

**Application of parable, v. 21:** "So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God" (οὕτως ὁ θησαυρίζων ἑαυτῷ καὶ μὴ εἰς θεὸν πλουτῶν.).

Howard Marshall (*New International Greek Testament Commentary*, Logos Systems) underscores in his comments both the meaning of the statement as well as the variations in wording of the Greek text down through the early centuries of copying:

The closing verse is omitted by D a b, probably by accident, the omission would produce an awkward transition from v. 20 to v. 22 (Metzger, 160f.; Jeremias, *Words*,



149). The comment brings out the latent meaning of the parable. The rich man gathered treasure (θησαυρίζω, Mt. 6:19f.) for himself ( αὐτῷ, κ Β pc; ἐαυτῷ, *rell*; TR; Diglot), but failed to grow rich as regards God. He thus failed in the end even to gather wealth for himself. The phrase appears to mean the same as laying up treasure in heaven; Jeremias, *Parables*, 106, suggests that it means entrusting one's wealth to God. Jeremias (*ibid.*) is inclined to regard the rest of the verse as a moralising addition to the parable, changing it from an eschatological warning to a warning against the wrong use of riches. Creed, 173, sees it as a transition to the next section; but the thought of treasure in heaven is so far away (v. 33) that this is unlikely. The comment fits the message of the parable according to our interpretation of it, and can be original. Various late MSS add to the end of the verse the stereotyped phrase ταῦτα λέγων ἐφώνει ὁ ἔχων ὅσα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω (cf. 8:8 and similar additions at 8:15; 13:9; 21:4; cf. Mt. 25:29, 30); it is due to lectionary usage and is not original, despite the presence of a similar addition in G. Thomas 63 (J. N. Birdsall\*).

The summary of 12:13-21 by John Nolland (*WBC*, Logos Systems) is quite insightful:

The focus of answerability moves now from the need for a clear-cut acknowledgment of Jesus to the need for a right evaluation and use of material wealth. The appeal to Jesus to intervene in an inheritance dispute threatens to be a bizarre and inverted repetition of what happened when Moses intervened in Exod 2:14. The rich man, feeling that all his life's needs are fully satisfied by his recent bumper crop, finds that he is in for a rude surprise.

The rights and wrongs of the claims of the person who asks for Jesus to intervene remain unimportant and out of sight in the Gospel account, though no doubt he will have considered that he had a good case. The story emphasizes this person's attempt to turn to his own ends Jesus' status and moral authority.

Jesus declines to intervene, and says so by means of an allusion to Exod 2:14. The tone is ironical, and Jesus seems to challenge the petitioner to recognize whether he is trying to make use of a perceived status and authority in Jesus without facing the claim upon his own life implicit in that status and authority. If Jesus is some kind of "new Moses," then he needs to be heard and obeyed (Deut 18:18-19).

This challenge gives way to teaching on greed and the nature of life. Greed is the desire to have more, to get one's hands on whatever one can, to acquire without reference to

one's own specific needs or the situation of others. The greedy person is confused about life, since a humanly meaningful and satisfying life has very little to do with how extensive one's possessions are. The "greed" clause relates most pointedly back to the concern over inheritance; the clause about the abundance of possessions corresponds more closely with the parable to come.

The farmer of our story was already rich before his claim to economic sufficiency is sealed by the bounty of one of those very special years when everything has gone right. His barns have no capacity to contain all the produce of this bountiful year, so with clear-sightedness and practical wisdom he upgrades his storage capability so that all his stores can be maintained most efficiently.

When the work is done, he will be in a position to relax and enjoy his good fortune. All his responsibilities in life will have now been met, and all the needs of his life will now be satisfied, or so he thinks. (The "soul" by which the farmer addresses himself is the "self" but with overtones of the life-force that animates the body.) But God bursts in upon the self-satisfaction of his life. At this point, with so much wealth at his disposal, this

person should rightly have seen that his responsibilities had only begun. (There may be a [negative] echo of how Joseph dealt with the bumper crops of Egypt in the seven good years.) This farmer has not reckoned on his answerability to God for his life. The life-force, from which stems all our power to act (see Gen 2:7), one has as a trust from God, and he may ask for its return at any point. As the

parable ends, the foolishness of the farmer's narrow aims is highlighted by the contrast between his many years of supply and the few hours that remain to him of life. Did he think that in securing his economic future he had secured the future of his life as well?

v 21 offers a final application of the parable. It is really a compressed expression of what we find in Matt 6:19-21 (and compare Luke 12:32-33). The farmer was right to the extent that he saw that life is about the accumulation of wealth, but what kind of wealth should we be primarily concerned with accumulating? To "become rich with God in view" refers in the present context primarily to the use in obedience to God of one's material wealth for the relief of real needs in the world. The point could be generalized to all acts of compassion.



**Greek NT**

12.13 Εἶπεν δὲ τι, ἐκ τοῦ ὄχλου αὐτῶ, Διδάσκαλε, εἰπέ τῷ ἀδελφῷ μου μερίσασθαι μετ' ἐμοῦ τὴν κληρονομίαν. 12.14 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῶ, Ἄνθρωπε, τίς με κατέστησεν κριτὴν ἢ μεριστὴν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς; 12.15 εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτοῦς, Ὁρᾶτε καὶ φυλάσσεσθε ἀπὸ πάσης πλεονεξίας, ὅτι οὐκ ἐν τῷ περισσεύειν τινὶ ἡ ζωὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστίν ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῶ. 12.16 Εἶπεν δὲ παραβολὴν πρὸς αὐτοὺς λέγων, Ἄνθρώπου τινὸς πλουσίου εὐφόρησεν ἡ χώρα. 12.17 καὶ διελογίζετο ἐν ἑαυτῷ λέγων, Τί ποιήσω, ὅτι οὐκ ἔχω τοῦ συνάξω τοὺς καρπούς μου; 12.18 καὶ εἶπεν, Τοῦτο ποιήσω, καθελωσ μου τὰς ἀποθήκας καὶ μείζονα, οἰκοδομήσω καὶ συνάξω ἐκεῖ πάντα τὸν σῖτον καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ μου. 12.19 καὶ ἐρῶ τῆς ψυχῆς μου, Ψυχὴ, ἔχεις πολλὰ ἀγαθὰ κείμενα εἰ, ἔτη πολλά ἀναπαύου, φάγε, πίε, εὐφραίνου. 12.20 εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῶ ὁ θεός, Ἄφρων, ταύτη τῆ νυκτὶ τὴν ψυχὴν σου ἀπαιτοῦσιν ἀπὸ σοῦ· ἃ δὲ ἠτοίμασας, τίτι ἔσται; 12.21 οὕτως ὁ θησαυρίζων ἑαυτῶ καὶ μὴ εἰς θεὸν πλουτῶν.

**NASB**

13 Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." 14 But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." 16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' 18 "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." 20 But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' 21 So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

**NRSV**

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." 14 But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." 16 Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" 18 Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' 20 But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

**NLT**

13 Then someone called from the crowd, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me." 14 Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?" 15 Then he said, "Beware! Don't be greedy for what you don't have. Real life is not measured by how much we own." 16 And he gave an illustration: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. 17 In fact, his barns were full to overflowing. 18 So he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store everything. 19 And I'll sit back and say to myself, My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!' 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get it all?' 21 "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."

## Greek NT Diagram

12.13	δέ	
A	Εἶπεν τις	ἐκ τοῦ ὄχλου αὐτῶ,
1		Διδάσκαλε, εἰπέ τῷ ἀδελφῷ μου μερίσασθαι...τὴν κληρονομίαν. μετ' ἐμοῦ
12.14	δέ	
B	ὁ εἶπεν αὐτῶ,	Ἄνθρωπε, τίς με κατέστησεν κριτὴν ἢ μεριστὴν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς;
12.15	δέ	
Γ	εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς,	Ὅρατε καὶ φυλάσσεσθε ἀπὸ πάσης πλεονεξίας, ἐν τῷ περισσεύειν τινὶ ὅτι οὐκ...ἡ ζωὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστίν ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῶ
12.16	δέ	
Δ	Εἶπεν παραβολὴν πρὸς αὐτούς λέγων,	Ἄνθρώπου τινὸς πλουσίου εὐφόρησεν ἡ χώρα. καὶ διελογίζετο ἐν ἑαυτῷ λέγων, Τί ποιήσω, ὅτι οὐκ ἔχω ποῦ συνάξω τοὺς καρπούς μου;
12.17		
6		
12.18	καὶ	
7	εἶπεν,	Τοῦτο ποιήσω, καθελῶ μου τὰς ἀποθήκας καὶ μείζονας οἰκοδομήσω καὶ συνάξω ἐκεῖ πάντα τὸν σῖτον καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ μου καὶ ἐρῶ τῆς ψυχῆς μου, Ψυχή, ἔχεις πολλὰ ἀγαθὰ κείμενα εἰς ἔτη πολλά·
12.19		

ἀναπαύου,  
 φάγε,  
 πίε,  
 εὐφραίνου.

12.20

8

δὲ  
 εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεός,

Ἄφρων,

ταύτη τῇ νυκτὶ

τὴν ψυχὴν σου ἀπαιτοῦσιν  
 ἀπὸ σοῦ·

δὲ

ἃ ἠτοίμασας,

τίτι ἔσται;

9 12.21

οὕτως ὁ θησαυρίζων ἑαυτῷ  
 καὶ  
 μὴ  
 εἰς θεὸν  
 πλουτῶν.

### Semantic Diagram

δὲ

A-----	A	2	Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	τις
I--	Διδάσκαλε							
B-----	1	2	Aor	Act	Imp+	2	S	(συ)
δὲ								
1-----	B	2	Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	ὁ (Jesus)
A--	Ἄνθρωπε							
2-----	2	1	Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	τίς
δὲ								
1-----	Γ	2	Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	(Jesus)
II-B--	---							
a-----	3	1	Aor	Act	Imp+	2	P	(ὕμεῖς)
2--	καὶ							
b-----	4	Pres	Mid	Imp+	2	P	(ὕμεῖς)	
δὲ								
1-----	Δ	2	Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	(Jesus)
a-----	---							
C--	5	1	Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	ἡ χώρα
a)-----	καὶ							
i--	6	Imperf	Dep	Ind	3	S	(rich man)	
2--b--  b)-----	καὶ							
	7	2	Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	(rich man)
δὲ								
ii-----	8	2	Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	ὁ θεός
c-----	---							
	9	(Pres	---	Ind	3	S	ὁ θησαυρίζων...καὶ μὴ πλουτῶν	

### Summary of Rhetorical Structure:

The pericope revolves around a question and answer. An unnamed individual from within the crowd of people asked Jesus to arbitrate the settlement of an inheritance (statement A). Jesus' answer is pre-

sented in a three part response (statements B - Δ). First, Jesus disavows any intention of intervening in the dispute over an inheritance (statement B). Second, he issues a two fold challenge to the crowd, not just the individual, to avoid greed, *πλεονεξίας* (statement Γ). Third, he tells a parable to illustrate his warning about greed (statement Δ).

The parable structure is somewhat more involved (statements 5-9). Statement 5 is a topic sentence setting up the story. Statements 6-7 record the rich man's inward development of a plan to handle his anticipated wealth. Statement 8 records God's condemnation of the rich man's plan. Statement 9 applies the story to Jesus' audience.

