A syntactical reading of Luke 12:35-48

J J J van Rensburg

ABSTRACT
A syntactical reading of a text aims at providing the parameters for the interpretation of the text. The aim of this paper is to do just that: to provide these parameters for the interpretation of Luke 12:35-48, to evaluate possible syntactic readings of Luke 12:35-48, and to suggest a syntactically viable reading.

1 PREMISES

1.1 Syntactical reading of a text
The syntactical reading of a text comprises the following actions:

The delimitation of the different syntactic components; the determination of the relationships (or relational possibilities) between the different syntactic components or groups of syntactic components, taking into consideration not only morphological and syntactic issues, but also (in a broad sense) semantic issues; the semantic interpretation of the relationships between syntactic components (i.e. on micro level) and between groups of syntactic components (i.e. on macro level).

These steps are not chronologically successive; there is a continuous interaction between them. None of the steps can effectively be completed without the other steps being taken. Therefore, none of the steps is completed before the whole (i.e. all the steps) has been completed on micro and macro level.

1.2 Syntactic component
A syntactic component is a part of speech or combination of parts of speech which is in a semantically significant relationship with another part of speech, or combination of parts of speech in a sentence. Syntactic components can combine into a syntactic unit which stand in a relationship with another syntactic component or syntactic unit.

Syntactic relationships are therefore not limited to the single intra-sentence, but exist from the smallest micro to the largest macro level, from the relationship between two single parts of speech to the relationship between a sentence (as a semantically significant combination of different words) and another sentence, to the relationship of a paragraph to a sentence or another paragraph.

1.3 Syntactic structure
The syntactic structure of a text is the structure which is created by the inter-relationships of the syntactic components of the text.
Syntactic structure on the micro level is the (possible) structure(s) created by the relationships of the syntactic components of a limited section of the text, namely the sentence level. This section forms a syntactic unit.

Syntactic structure on the macro level is the (possible) structure(s) which is created by the relationships of the syntactic units of the whole text, namely on the inter-sentence and inter-paragraph level.

1.4 Not a pure syntactical process
The syntactical reading of a text is not a pure syntactical process. Word order, cases, conjunctions and relational particles are important markers in the syntactical reading of a text, but they are not interpretable on their own. Whenever a decision has to be made between two or more possible syntactic relations, such a decision cannot merely be made by taking only syntactic arguments into consideration. A viable decision is only possible when arguments from all the other facets of language are taken into consideration.

The fact that a syntactical reading of a text cannot be a pure syntactical process becomes even more evident when macro level syntactic reading is done. Although first-century Greek has an explicit designation of the relationship between syntactic units (i.e., syntactic structure on macro level), such explicit designation is often lacking. This contributes to the fact that the syntactical reading of a text is not a single-level reading in which only syntactical considerations are used. It is rather one possible reading of a text, in which considerations from other readings of the text are of major importance.

1.5 Syntax only in a relative sense an "objective criterion"
It has been ten years since Deist (1978:261-268) argued convincingly that a reading of a text must never be identified with the text itself. Every reading is mediated by a theory. This also applies to the syntactical reading of a text. A syntactical reading is objective only to the extent that the relationships it distinguishes are simple and without ambiguity. As soon as a decision between two possible relationships has to be made, the objectivity of the reading becomes relative.

1.6 The possibility of different viable readings of the same text
Different viable readings of a text are possible. There is, however, at least one constraint: the syntactical viability of the reading. The syntax does not limit the possible readings of a text to a single reading, but every reading must be syntactically possible to be a viable reading. Louw (1979:14) argues that "in analysing discourse, syntactic features will always have priority". This statement, when applied to the reading of text in general, must be elaborated and adapted to the following: for any reading of a text to be a viable reading, it should operate within the syntactic parameters of the text.
1.7 The representation of syntactic structure
The following symbols have been used in the representation of the syntactic structure in this paper:

* To indicate the relationship between two components, the component being "qualified" is underlined, and a connecting line is drawn to the "qualifier":

\[ \text{qualified} \rightarrow \text{qualifier} \]

* Three relationships are distinguished separately by the connecting line:

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{verb} & \quad \text{subject} \\
\text{verb} & \quad \text{object} \\
\text{vocative} & \quad \text{vocative}
\end{align*} \]

* The relationship of the article is not indicated; it is regarded as being one syntactic component with its noun.
* A prepositional phrase is also regarded as a single syntactic component.
* A bracketed component indicates that the particular component does not appear in the text but has been assumed to facilitate the representation of the syntactic structure.

2 DEMARCATION OF THE PERICOPE
Luke 12:35-48 is regarded as a pericope in the edition of the United Bible Society (Third edition [corrected]), but with a break after verse 40. The 1983 Afrikaans translation of the Bible also regards these verses as a pericope, with interruptions at verse 40, verse 41, verse 44, and verse 46. The Good News Bible (The Bible in Today's English version), as well as The New International Version, regards verses 35-40 as a pericope, and verses 41-48, with interruptions at verse 41 and verse 46, as another pericope.

A syntactic assessment of the demarcation of the pericope does not deliver much, the reasons being the following:

* There are no syntactic markers designating verse 35 as the beginning of the pericope. Neither is there any syntactic prohibition on a pericope starting at verse 35.
* There is no syntactic indication that the present pericope ends at verse 48. Neither is there any syntactic indication that a new pericope starts at verse 49.
* The δὲ introducing verse 41 is a typical marker of a new pericope. It does not, however, force the start of a new pericope.

Syntactically there are no decisive arguments pertaining to the demarcation of the pericope. This will have to be decided as a result of arguments other than those based on a syntactical reading.
3 READING SYNTACTICALLY ON THE MICRO AND MACRO LEVELS

3.1 Verse 35
On the micro level the word order needs consideration. A more neutral word order would have been with the participle περιεξωσμέναι immediately after ἔστωσαν:

Present order

More neutral order

The significance of the word order is not readily apparent. It could be that the exhortational character is emphasised.

On the macro level verse 35 consists of two sentences connected by καί. This connector could be interpreted as epexigetical:

The connector could however also be interpreted as having a coordinating function. If the καί is interpreted as epexigetical, the second sentence only explicates the first; if it is interpreted as coordinating, two distinct instructions are given. A decision will have to be made on the content level: if the two metaphors are synonymous, the καί must be interpreted as epexigetical; if, however, they are not, the καί must be interpreted as coordinating.

Nielsen (1979:368) disconnects the two sentences, and sees verse 36 and the following as an application of only the second sentence. This view seems very improbable.

The relationship between the two sentences are tentatively interpreted as coordination:
3.2 Verse 36
On the micro level verse 36 has no syntactic ambiguities. One would have expected the participles ἐλθόντος καὶ κρούσαντος to be dative. The fact that they are genitive are not, however, semantically significant (cf Blass & Debrunner 1961:218).

On the macro level the introductory καὶ must be interpreted, since it connects verse 36 rather loosely to verse 35 (cf Marshall 1978:535). It could have a coordinating function. Verse 36 then introduces a third exhortation, coordinated with the two in verse 35:

However, it seems more probable that the καὶ has an epexigetical function. It does not introduce a third exhortation, but introduces a section that gives an explanation of the exhortations in verse 35. This καὶ has a function similar to that generally ascribed to οὐς:

3.3 Verse 37
On the micro level there are no syntactic ambiguities. One remark concerning the word order is, however, necessary: the position of γρηγοροῦντας makes it the informational focus of the sentence (cf also Marshall 1978:536). The more neutral position would have been immediately after the relative pronoun οὓς:
A few considerations have to be taken into account on the macro level. There is no explicit designation of the relation of verse 37 and the following to the preceding text. A possible (and to my mind the most probable) interpretation is to take verse 37 and the following as a motivation for the exhortation in verse 36. An explicit designation could have been the particle γάρ.

The relation of ὁμὴν λέγω to the preceding text needs consideration. There is no syntactic indication as to the character of this relationship. A possible interpretation is that ὁμὴν λέγω ... is a motivation for the statement that those servants are blessed at the beginning of verse 37 (so also Marshall 1978:536). An explicit designation could have been the particle γάρ.

The relation of the two καὶ sentences at the end of verse 37 to the preceding text warrants investigation. The two καὶ sentences could be interpreted as being coordinate with ὅτι περιζώσεται:

This, however, seems improbable, since the three actions are not distinct, but the one builds on the other. It is, therefore, better to interpret the καὶ sentences as climactic.

36 καὶ ... (ἐστετε) δυοιοι

37 ἡμάριοι (εἰςῳ)

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2010).
3.4 Verse 38
On the micro level only one remark is necessary: the use of the second καυ is rather unusual. One would have expected και without the ἐάν added. It seems as if the και became καυ under the influence of the preceding καυ. It is, however, not semantically or syntactically significant.

On the macro level the relation of the first και sentence in verse 38 to the preceding text is not immediately evident. There are two possibilities. It could be parallel to the two και sentences immediately preceding in verse 37, or a continuation of the οτι:

Although not impossible, this seems improbable, especially because the tempus of the verbs of the preceding three sentences is futurum, whereas the one in verse 38 is praesens (μακάριοι εἰσιν).

Closer examination indicates the greater probability, namely that it is parallel to μακάριοι οἱ δοῦλοι at the beginning of verse 37. The και is therefore interpreted as continuing the motivation for the exhortation in verse 36. Verses 37 and 38 are therefore interpreted as being a twofold motivation for the statement in verse 36:

3.5 Verse 39
On the micro level there are no syntactic ambiguities.

On the macro level the interpretation of the particle δὲ will determine the relationship of verse 39 to that preceding it. The most probable interpretation
of the δὲ is to view it as a continuation of the introductory καὶ in verse 36. The γνῶσκετε in verse 39 can be either indicative or imperative. To interpret it as imperative fits the context the best. Thus it corresponds with the imperatival character of the beginning of verse 36. The καὶ in verse 36 has been interpreted as epeixigetical to verse 35. Verses 36-38 and verse 39 are thus a twofold explication of verse 35, i.e., of what it means to have the loins girded and the lamps burning.

3.6 Verse 40
On the micro level there are no syntactic ambiguities.

On the macro level the interpretation of the καὶ is decisive for the determination of the relation of verse 40 to the preceding text. It can be interpreted as a continuation of the δὲ of verse 39, which would make verse 40 a mere third explication of verse 35:
This does not seem probable, because it does not introduce a new metaphor to both verses 36-38 and verse 39. Therefore the καί in verse 40 is interpreted as conclusive, having the same force as the particle οὖν:

3.7 Verse 41
On the micro level two remarks are necessary, namely the word order of πρὸς ἡμᾶς and the function of καί.

The unusual position of the prepositional phrase πρὸς ἡμᾶς is evident when one considers the syntactical structure representation. A more usual position would have been immediately before καί πρὸς πάντας and after the verb λέγεις:

More neutral word order

Present word order
Because of its present position πρὸς ἡμᾶς carries special emphasis and is the informational focus (cf James 1980:45).

The καὶ preceding πρὸς πᾶντας is adjectival to πᾶντας; it is not here used as coordinating conjunction.

On the macro level the interpretation of the particle δὲ in verse 41 determines the relation of verse 41 to the preceding text. The interpretation that seems to suit the context the best is to regard δὲ as having conclusive force (as οὖν would have had). Peter’s question is a reaction to the two parables told by Jesus:

3.8 Verse 42
On the micro level a remark concerning verse 42 is necessary: the word order position of ὁ φρόνιμος. This phrase carries special emphasis. The more neutral position would have been to coordinate it with ὁ πιστός, and to place it immediately after πιστός, prefixing the conjunction καὶ:

More neutral word order  Present word order
δὲ πιστός  δὲ πιστός
καὶ φρόνιμος  οἰκουνόμοις
οἰκουνόμοις  δὲ φρόνιμος

Marshall (1978:540) remarks that the force of the ὁφα is not clear. However, he makes no suggestion pertaining to its use, except stating that it could be consequential to verse 40 if verse 41 is not original. A more probable use of ὁφα here is that it forecasts the effect of enlightenment which the answer will bring (for a discussion of this use of the particle see Denniston 1966:39). What makes this interpretation viable is the fact that it does not need any changes in the text itself.

On the macro level it seems most in keeping with the context to interpret the καὶ introducing this verse as having successional force, and possibly con-
sequential force (cf Blass & Debrunner 1961:235): Jesus' words are an answer following on and resulting from Peter's question.

3.9 Verse 43
On the micro level one remark suffices: it could be argued that the participle ἐλθὼν receives emphasis because of its position. Although not an altogether unusual position, a position after the subject would have been more customary.

There is no particle designating the relation to the preceding text on the macro level. An examination of the contents, however, makes it evident that verse 43 is Jesus' own answer to his question in verse 42:
3.10 Verse 44
On the micro level the position of the phrase ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς ὑπάρχουσιν ἀυτοῦ points to the fact that this section is emphasised. The more neutral position would have been after the verb καταστήσει:

Present word order

More neutral word order

On the macro level there is no explicit indication of the relation of verse 44 to the preceding text. Again a decision has to be made solely on ground of the contents. Verse 44 gives the reason why the slave mentioned in verse 43 is μακάριος (cf Marshall 1978:541). If a particle had been used, it could have been γάρ.

43 μακάριος (ἐστίν)

44 δὲ δοῦλος ἐκεῖνος...

3.11 Verse 45 + 46a
The first remark on the micro level pertains to the function of καὶ μεθύσκεσθαι. It could either have a coordinating function or an epexigetical function:

Coordinating

Epexigetical

The decision will have to be made after the use of the two verbs has been determined - i.e. whether three actions (eating, drinking, and getting drunk) are to be understood or only two actions (eating, and drinking and getting drunk). The latter seems more probable.

The second remark also pertains to the question of whether a καὶ is epexigetical or coordinating, that is, the one in the phrase καὶ ἐν ὀψ ἣ ὦ γινώσκει.
The decision will depend on the interpretation of the two phrases. If these are interpreted as not adding a new dimension, the καὶ will be epexigetical. Otherwise it will be coordinating, making a second distinct statement. The epexigetical function seems more probable.

On the macro level verses 45-46a are introduced by δὲ (the second word in verse 45). When taking the contents into consideration, it seems probable that δὲ ... ἐξεῖ continues Jesus’ answer to his own question. Verses 43-44 provide the first part of the answer; verses 45-46a constitute the second part. The first part is positive, and the second negative:
3.12 Verse 46b
Only one remark on the micro level is necessary: the position of the phrase τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ shows that it is the informational focus of the sentence. The more neutral position for the object is to follow the verb:

```
More neutral word order
τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ
μετὰ τῶν ἁπίστων

Present word order
τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ
μετὰ τῶν ἁπίστων
```

On the macro level the interpretation of the two καὶ's needs attention. The force of the first καὶ in verse 46b is consequent upon ἔξει at the beginning of verse 46; it states the action resulting from the coming of the master.

The interpretation of the second καὶ has two possibilities. One is that it should be interpreted as epexegetic:

```
καὶ διχοτομήσει

θήσει
```

The other possibility is that it has the same consecutive force as the previous καὶ, in which case it states a second action, resulting from the coming of the master. Whether this is indeed the case will become clear if the use of διχοτομήσει can be established. If it means to cut off from other people (as suggested by Dodd [1946:159]), the force of the καὶ is consecutive. If, however, it means to hack to pieces the καὶ will be coordinate (cf Marshall 1978:544, and Ellingworth 1980:243). A tentative decision (to be verified on the basis of other readings of this text) is to interpret the καὶ as coordinate:
3.13 Verses 47 + 48a

On the micro level the first καὶ of verse 47 needs interpretation. It could be interpreted as either being coordinating or anti-climactic. If the decision is in favour of coordination, the three participle phrases constitute two distinct qualifications (the last being a double qualification) of ὁ ἐκεῖνος δοῦλος:

It is however more probable that the καὶ has an anti-climactic function, because of the contents of the three phrases, and, to a lesser extent, because of the fact that the last two participles are anarthrous. If the καὶ is interpreted as being anti-climactic, a translation equivalent will be: "the slave who knows what his master wants, but nevertheless did not get ready or act according to his will." The last two phrases are then qualifications of the participle phrase ὁ γνῶναι:

On the macro level the relation of the two δορθεῖται sentences both to each other and to the preceding text must be established. Their relation to each other is quite clear: the second sentence is adversely coordinated to the first. The second δὲ (the first one in v 48) is therefore interpreted as an adversative coordinator.

The relation of the two sentences to the preceding text centres on the interpretation of the δὲ at the beginning of verse 47. No interpretation can be made without taking the contents into consideration. It becomes clear that verses 47 + 48 are not loosely related to the preceding text. At the end of the previous verse (v 46) the severe punishment by the master is stated. Verses 47 + 48 draw a conclusion pertaining to the punishment meted out by the master: an unfaithful slave who knows his master's will, will be punished more harshly, but one who does not know it, less. The δὲ therefore has conclusive force.
The καὶ that joins ζητηθῆσεται and αἰτήσουσι must be interpreted to decide whether it is coordinating or epexigetical. If it is interpreted as coordinate, two distinct statements are made:

An examination of the contents, however, could show that the second sentence is a repetition of the first sentence. It then will seem more probable that the καὶ must be interpreted as epexigetical. This is tentatively assumed.

One last consideration on the macro level remains, namely the relation of verse 48b to the preceding text. Verse 48b is introduced by the particle δὲ. Here again the function of this particle can only be ascertained when the contents and the context are taken into account. Tentatively the most probable interpretation is that v 48b draws a conclusion from the statement of the dif-
ferentiating punishment in verses 47 + 48a. The δὲ therefore has conclusive force.

48

4 A SYNOPSIS OF THE PROBABLE SYNTACTICAL READING

The probable syntactical reading of each syntactical unit has been argued above. When the representations of the different units are put together, the following synopsis of the syntactical structure on the micro and macro levels is arrived at:
The following representation omits the micro level structure, and gives a synopsis of the syntactically probable macro level structure of Luke 12:35-48:
The basic exhortation: Be ready

* V.35a Be dressed ready for service  
* V.35b And keep your lamps burning

A first parable, explaining the basic exhortation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The nucleus of the parable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V.36a You must be like men who are waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The purpose of waiting for the master

| V.36b So that when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him |

First reason for the exhortation to be like waiting servants

| V.37a Blessed are those servants whom their master at his coming will find on the alert |

Reason for the statement that such servants are blessed

| V.37b I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at table and will come and wait on them |

Second reason for the exhortation to be like waiting servants

| V.38 And even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night and finds them so, blessed are they |

A second parable explaining the basic exhortation

| V.39 Of this be assured, if the owner of a house had known at what hour the burglar was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into |

A summarizing exhortation as conclusion

| V.40a Therefore you must always be ready  
| V.40b For at an hour when you do not expect him, the Son of man arrives |

Peter's question in reaction to Jesus' parables

| V.41 Peter asked him: Lord, are you telling this parable to us or to everyone? |

Jesus answers Peter with a question

| V.42 The Lord answered: Who then is the faithful and sensible manager whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their food allowance at the proper time |

The first (positive) part of Jesus' answer to his own question

| V.43 Blessed is that slave whom the master finds so doing when he returns |

The reason why that slave is blessed

| V.44 I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions |
The second (negative) part of Jesus' answer to his own question

**The unfaithfulness of the slave**

*V.45* If that slave says to himself: my master is taking a long time coming, and begins to beat up the men and the women slaves, and to eat and drink and get drunk

**The position of the unfaithful slave**

*V.46* The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him, yes at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces, and assign him a place with the unfaithful

A conclusion pertaining to the punishment by the master

* V.47 That slave who knows his master's will but does not get ready or act in accordance with that will, will be beaten with many blows

* V.48a But he who, while not knowing, did things that call for a beating, will be beaten with few blows

**The implication of the discriminating punishment**

*V.48b* From every one who has been given much, much will be demanded; yes, from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be demanded

### WORKS CONSULTED


Botha, J 1986. 'n Hamer, 'n saag en 'n skroewdraaier - oor metodes van ontleding van die Griekse teks van die Nuwe Testament. *Koers* 51, 328-368.


J J J van Rensburg, Department of Greek, P.U. for C.H.E., Potchefstroom 2520. Republic of South Africa.