Charles L. Quarles’s commentary on the Gospel of Matthew is the latest installment in B&H’s *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament*-series, edited by A. J. Köstenberger and R. W. Yarbrough. Like other volumes in the series, it attempts to bridge the gap between introductory Greek grammars and mastery of interpretation of the Greek text. In contrast to the commentaries on shorter biblical books, however, Quarles’s study does not include full translations and structural diagrams of the individual passages. It is a grammatical analysis that stands front and center as Quarles works through the Greek (UBS5) text of the First Gospel, paragraph by paragraph, verse by verse, while at the same time highlighting key vocabulary and significant text-critical issues. Given the length of Matthew’s Gospel and the amount of material Quarles needs to review in a rather limited space, the presentation is quite dense and full of abbreviations. There is little room for detailed recounting and discussion of different views on given subjects—such as possible translations, textual criticism, interpretation, and discourse features—and for the most part, though not always, Quarles simply has to give his own informed opinion instead of providing arguments in its favor and refuting possible objections.

As it is difficult (not to say tedious) to summarize this type of presentation, a handful of well-known Matthean grammatical conundrums will have to do in order to illustrate Quarles’s approach.
Our first example comes from 11:12, where Matthew writes: ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν ἰμερῶν Ἰωάννου τοῦ βαπτιστοῦ ἔως ἥρτι ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν βιάζεται καὶ βιασταὶ ἀρπάζουσιν αὐτήν. A longstanding scholarly debate regarding this logion is whether βιάζεται is passive or middle. Does the kingdom suffer violence, or is it forcing its way? Quarles notes the two interpretative alternatives and how most English translations, for example, NIV, CSB, LEB, ESV, NLT (see 4), opt for the former but also provide a translation of the middle voice in the margin. Quarles, however, finds the following clause, about violent people acting against the kingdom, to suggest that βιάζεται is a passive.

A second illustration of Quarles’s methodology is 21:7, ἠγαγον τὴν ὄνον καὶ τὸν πῶλον καὶ ἐπέθηκαν ἐπ’ αὐτῶν τὰ ἱμάτια, καὶ ἐπεκάθισεν ἐπάνω αὐτῶν, and the question whether the second αὐτῶν refers to the donkey and its colt or to the cloaks. At this point Quarles is a bit more argumentative:

Αὐτῶν refers to τὰ ἱμάτια … and not the donkey and the foal, per the law of the nearest referent. Notice that the garments remain the focus of v. 8 as well. Most EVV leave the antecedent of the pronoun ambiguous. However, the NIV specifies the correct referent: “place their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on.” Some scholars argue that the pron. is a generalizing pl. that refers to the animals viewed collectively but that Jesus rode only on the foal. (244)

Our third and final example comes from 27:9–10, τότε ἔλαβον τὰ τριάκοντα ἀργύρια, τὴν τιμὴν τοῦ τετιμημένου ὡς ἡγιάζοντα ἄργαρε, τὴν τιμήν τοῦ τετιμημένου ἀνὴρ ὑἱῶν Ἰσραήλ, καὶ ἐδώκαν αὐτὰ εἰς τὸν ἄγρον τοῦ κεραμέως, καθὼς συνέταξεν μοι κύριος. Is ἔλαβον first-person singular or third-person plural? In other words, who took the thirty pieces of silver, “I” or “they”? Quarles notes the two interpretative options but marks the latter with an asterisk (*), indicating that it constitutes his own preference, that “they took the thirty pieces of silver…” (emphasis added).

Besides treatment of grammatical matters, the discussions of the individual passages all conclude with a list of literature for further study and with basic homiletical suggestions. To take the passage in which the second example above appears (Matt 21:1–11) as an illustration, Quarles proposes the following homiletical points: (1) Jesus fulfilled messianic prophecy; (2) Jesus was given a king’s welcome; (3) Jesus was praised and adored; (4) and Jesus was recognized as a prophet (246).

At last, in addition to the grammatical analysis, there is a brief introduction treating issues of authorship, date, place of origin, and language (3–11). Here Quarles assumes a thoroughly conservative/evangelical position as he attributes the gospel to the apostle Matthew, who he thinks probably composed it during the 60s CE, perhaps in Hebrew or
Aramaic, somewhere in Palestine. The commentary is rounded off by an exegetical outline of the text, as well as with grammar and Scripture indices.

There is much to commend in Quarles's commentary. The analyses are balanced, accurate, and evince the type of mastery of interpretation of the Greek text set out as an ideal for the series. The commentary is both a reliable and expedient guide for the pastor or student with basic training in Greek—who together seem to constitute the primary target audience—to have open next to the Greek text of Matthew on the desk when preparing sermons or writing exegetical papers. One might, of course, come to alternative decisions on certain individual matters such as the ones above, but Quarles’s grammatical judgments are nonetheless overall possible in and of themselves. Moreover, the suggestions on literature for further study are up to date and show familiarity with the broader academic conversation. While these bibliographies are by no means exhaustive, they nevertheless list significant contributions to the discussion of a given passage and set the reader looking to delve deeper into the meaning of the pertinent pericope well on his or her way. Speaking of suggested additional literature, I wonder, however, why there is—with the exception of the great tomes of Davies and Allison and Luz—no mention of commentaries from nonevangelical perspectives or in German or French in the list of recommended commentaries (10–11). Fortunately, the individual bibliographies listing works for further study do not demonstrate the same tendency. Regarding the homiletical suggestions, Quarles points out (3) that there are at times a disconnect between them and the linguistic analyses, since the exegesis behind the former involves more than merely grammatical analysis. Nonetheless, I find the homiletical suggestions to be valuable in bringing out (some of) the theological and practical/ethical points and implications of the text—and at times they even provide the basic skeleton of a complete sermon.

Admittedly, this is not a full-scale commentary but one that focuses on grammatical analysis of the Greek text. Many questions that surface throughout the course of reading and interpreting a given Matthean passage are thus bound to be left without answer or sufficient discussion—and deliberately so. Still, with its careful and detailed grammatical analyses, helpful recommendations of relevant works for further study, together with suggestions on basic homiletical ideas and points, Quarles’s Matthew is a convenient entry point to the study of the Greek text of the First Gospel for the student or pastor who wants to come to his or her own informed exegetical decisions.