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The general introduction to the series says that the B&H Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament “aims to close the gap between the Greek text and the available tools” (xvi) for the benefit of four groups of readers: those reading the Greek text for the first time; those with some experience in Greek; more advanced students; and pastors. Those teaching such readers may also find it useful. Each volume begins with a brief introduction to the New Testament writing it interprets, discussing things such as authorship and date. The writing itself is then divided into paragraphs, and for each paragraph six things are provided: (1) the Greek text; (2) a structural analysis; (3) phrase-by-phrase discussion of vocabulary, textual variants, and grammatical analysis, including parsing; (4) various translations of significant words or phrases; (5) suggestions for further study; and (6) homiletical suggestions.

In his volume on 1 Peter, Greg W. Forbes briefly discusses authorship and concludes that arguments against Petrine authorship are unconvincing. Somewhat surprisingly, Forbes’s brief discussion of date then entertains the possibility that 1 Peter was not written by Peter. Forbes argues that, whether or not 1 Peter was written by Peter, it was written in the 60s or shortly afterward. Forbes follows this with helpful discussions of two
grammatical issues that are especially important for interpreting 1 Peter: the use of the imperative and imperatival participles.

Forbes’s discussion of the Greek text of 1 Peter is packed with helpful information. Much of this is presented so concisely that it may be rather difficult to understand, especially for those reading the text for the first time. The structural analysis is presented mainly by arranging the Greek text so that some words and phrases are positioned under others or in some cases connected to others by a line. The full significance of this arrangement is not immediately apparent and is never explained. The homiletical suggestions take the form of one or more outlines of each paragraph of the text. I myself do not prepare homilies, but I wonder how helpful these outlines would be for those who do. On the other hand, Forbes identifies possible topics for further study in connection with each paragraph and supplies a rather full bibliography for each of them. These should be very useful for anyone who wants to delve further into issues raised by 1 Peter.

The phrase-by-phrase discussion of vocabulary, textual variants, and so on forms the heart of the exegetical guide. In these sections Forbes uses many grammatical abbreviations (all listed in a table of abbreviations) and mentions many grammatical constructions without explanation (e.g., dative of advantage). Understanding these may be rather difficult for those reading the Greek text for the first time. Those who work through all of these things or who are already familiar with them will find an abundance of information helpful for understanding 1 Peter. Forbes parses many words, explains the meaning of these words and others, and discusses many syntactical issues. For the most important questions, Forbes gives a rather full account of the interpretations proposed by scholars and identifies what he considers the best of them. Such discussions are well informed by the most important academic commentaries on 1 Peter and offer sound interpretive guidance.

One thing that does not emerge very clearly from this treatment of 1 Peter is its sentence structure. This may be partly because of the division of the letter into relatively short paragraphs. For example, 1 Pet 1:3–12 should probably be understood as a single, long, complex sentence. At least part of the reason Forbes does not make this apparent is that he divides this section of 1 Peter into three paragraphs and discusses them individually. But even within each paragraph he does not explicitly describe the syntax of the paragraph as a whole.

The strengths and limitations of Forbes’s work can be seen in his treatment of 1 Pet 3:18–22, which he describes as one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament. Forbes treats this as the second part of the section 1 Pet 3:13–22. He notes that, because verse 18 begins with ὅτι, “the section division is somewhat artificial, although it is valid due to an
overall change in the subject matter” (121). This may be true, but it does not make it clear that verses 18–22 are the continuation of a sentence that begins in verse 17. Forbes’s discussion of the structure of verses 18–22 comments on a number of its grammatical features, identifies the antecedents of relative pronouns, and traces the overall progression of thought. However, he does not make it entirely clear how all the parts of this long sentence fit together.

In his phrase-by-phrase discussion of 1 Pet 3:18–22, Forbes discusses all of the important text-critical issues, parses several of the words used, and discusses the grammar and meaning of virtually every word, as well as its best translation. In discussing the most difficult grammatical and exegetical issues, Forbes describes the approaches of various scholars in some detail. For example, when he discusses the antecedent and meaning of ἐν ᾧ in verse 19, Forbes describes five different answers given by scholars; Forbes argues that the antecedent of the relative pronoun is πνεύματι in verse 18 and that the sense is “that Christ preached to the spirits in prison in the spiritual realm” (123). Another example: in discussing the identity of the “spirits in prison,” Forbes describes four scholarly proposals and argues that the “spirits in prison” are best understood as the fallen angels that Jewish exegetical tradition saw in Gen 6:1–4; Christ proclaimed his victory to them after his resurrection. Forbes similarly discusses three other issues raised by 1 Pet 3:18–22. Especially in these longer discussions, but also throughout this exegetical guide, Forbes judiciously argues for the interpretation he considers best but also gives readers information that will allow them to come to a different decision.

Of course, no one is likely to agree with everything Forbes says. Examples of small points on which I disagree include the following. (1) Forbes says that τὴν πίστιν and ἐλπίδα in 1:21 are accusatives of respect (p. 45); I see them as subjects of the infinitive ἔματε in the result clause introduced by ἢστε. (2) Forbes says that σαρκικός (a mistake for σαρκικός) in 2:11 “refers to that which is characteristic of fallen humanity … not in the narrow sense of sexual sin” (74). Since this is the only use of this word in 1 Peter, there seems to be little basis for this interpretation. It seems to me that it could just as well refer to desires associated with flesh in a literal sense, though these need not be limited to sexual desires. Forbes’s interpretation (and his interpretation of σάρξ elsewhere) may be unduly influenced by Pauline usage of these words. (3) Forbes says that δεσπότης is used with reference to God in 2 Pet 2:1 (86). Since this passage refers to the δεσπότης who bought the false teachers, it seems likely to me that it refers to Christ rather than to God.

Forbes’s treatment of 1 Peter is a very helpful resource, and all interpreters of the Greek text will want to use this book. It will probably be most useful to those with a somewhat advanced knowledge of Greek.