

## FOREWORD

THE MONSTERS ARE BACK. There was a time when sophisticated Western audiences, whether reading books or watching movies, did not expect to meet the mythical beasts they had perhaps enjoyed when they were younger. But now, with *The Lord of the Rings* and many other examples leading the way, we are all confronting once more the fabulous creatures of our earlier fantasies. On a personal note, now that I have grandchildren to read stories to, I cannot escape dragons. And I hope the new generation will be wiser than my own, and recognize these and similar monsters as vivid and irreplaceable ways of saying things about our world—our *real* world—and enabling us to come to terms with it.

The Bible is a highly sophisticated book, but its kind of sophistication never involved hiding from the myths and symbols of ancient religion. Instead, the biblical writers, in a wide variety of ways, picked up these images and, like a wise counselor exploring a client's dreams, turned them in fresh directions. Sea-monsters, was it? Israel's God had already defeated them. Leviathan, the ancient dragon? God's toy, a creature for the Almighty to play with. Marduk, the powerful divinity of Babylon? Sent packing into an ignominious captivity. And so on.

The New Testament's picture of Jesus, too, evokes these ancient monsters. The Gospel writers seem to walk on the surface of ancient mythology as Jesus walked on the surface of the water, daring Peter—and all of us—to follow him, to conquer our fears, to discover his victory over the dark sea and the creatures, real and imaginary, that it may contain.

In this splendid little book, Andrew Angel offers a guided tour of some of the most important monsters, both in the ancient non-Israelite world, where they played such an important role, and in the biblical writings themselves. In doing so he not only offers us a set of fascinating studies in key texts like the Psalms and the book of Job, revealing depths of lively and energetic meaning where we might otherwise see only florid language. He also offers, discreetly but clearly, ways of addressing the monsters that still haunt us as individuals and as a society. The multi-layered world of ancient imagery is more relevant to our own than we might have supposed. What at first sight might appear the least promising type of biblical material turns out, in this book, to contain some of the richest promises of all. The God of whom the Bible speaks, the Jesus we find in the Gospels, has won the victory over all the monsters. They are important, but they frighten us no longer. This book is thus, at the same time, an in-depth Bible study and an in-depth counseling session. A rare treat.

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