

In the last two issues of the *News*, we saw the woman, the church, labour in pregnancy with the man child, the Christ (Rev. 12:1-2). Now we turn to the “great red dragon” (3) who is identified as “that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world” (9).

Like the description of the woman in Revelation 12:1-2, that of the dragon is not to be taken literalistically. The Devil is not *literally* a “great red dragon” with “seven heads,” “ten horns” and “seven crowns” (3). Besides being well-nigh impossible to visualise, Revelation 12 calls this a “wonder” or *sign* (3) that points to Satan as possessing awful characteristics.

In general, the Devil is like a terrible monster: a great dragon with a mighty “tail” (4), 7 heads and 10 horns—unnatural, deformed and hideous!

His power is indicated in three ways. First, his size is “great.” Second, his “tail” casts a “third” of the stars down to the earth (4). Third, he has 10 horns, with horns in the Bible being a symbol of strength (cf. Deut. 33:17; Ps. 92:9-10).

The power of this dreadful dragon is used to bring destruction. He is coloured red, a fiery red, for he destroys like fire and sheds blood. As one who casts a third of the stars to the earth, he is destructive. He is also ravenous, ready to “devour” the woman’s man child (4) for, remember, he was a “murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44).

Clearly, Satan is evil. The Triune God created him an holy angel but he fell into the sin of pride (I Tim. 3:6; cf. Isa. 14:12-14) and so became a hideous monster. The Devil shows his sin in the opening verses of Revelation 12 in that he stands ready to devour Christ as soon as He is born (4). All the iniquity among men and angels is in the image of Satan (John 8:44).

Notice the symbolic numbers associated with the Devil. First, he has 7 heads and 7 crowns, with 7 being the number of the covenant. Satan is, therefore, the counterfeit covenant ruler.

Second, he reigns over his evil dominion by his 10 horns. The horns represent the Devil’s power, as we said earlier, while the number 10 speaks of the completeness—think of the 10 plagues and 10 commandments—of his strength, as measured out by Almighty God according to His holy purpose. In Jehovah’s sovereign plan, Satan uses his God-given strength to deceive fallen men and angels, to attack Christ while He was on earth and to persecute the church, as well as to produce the universal kingdom of the Antichrist, the Devil’s greatest work, whom Christ “shall destroy with the brightness of his coming” (II Thess. 2:8-9)

*Rev. Stewart*

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## Thank You and Welcome Back!

We begin this *Covenant Reformed News* with a hearty and well-deserved word of thanks to Prof. Herman Hanko. He has written in all or almost all of the previous 421 issues since the *News* was started 28 years ago in November, 1992, by Rev. Gise Van Baren, who is now in glory with Christ. Prof. Hanko is the most prolific writer in the history of the *News*, with most of his contributions being answers to the questions of our (increasingly international) readers on a whole host of important subjects. Earlier this month, he celebrated his 90th birthday and recovered from COVID-19 by God’s grace. Prof. has decided that it is now time to lay aside his work for the *News*.

Many thousands of people have read Prof. Hanko’s articles in the fortnightly and then monthly *News*, which they received by post or e-mail from the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church (CPRC) in N. Ireland or the Limerick Reformed Fellowship (LRF) in the Republic of Ireland or other churches (in America, Canada or the Philippines), or viewed on-line ([www.cprc.co.uk](http://www.cprc.co.uk); [www.prca.org](http://www.prca.org)). The professor’s contributions have also been sent forth by e-mail in Italian and Hungarian versions of the *News* to those who subscribed to our translators’ lists. Some of Prof. Hanko’s articles can be read in about 10 other languages on-line ([www.cprc.co.uk/covenant-reformed-news](http://www.cprc.co.uk/covenant-reformed-news)). On behalf of all those who have benefited from your writing in the *News* for almost 3 decades, we extend to you, Prof. Hanko, our sincere gratitude!

Now we cordially welcome our new writer, Pastor Ron Hanko, a son of the professor, who is taking over his role of answering readers’ questions. Rev. Hanko served as the missionary-pastor of the CPRC from 17 March (St. Patrick’s Day) in 1993 to February, 2001. During this time, he preached in many places in the United Kingdom and maintained a wide correspondence with saints throughout the British Isles. All of the first eight volumes of the *News*, apart from the opening issues in late 1992 and early 1993, were produced by him. Rev. Hanko next served a congregation in Lynden, Washington (USA), before retiring from the pastorate in 2017. After a gap of almost 20 years, welcome back, Rev. Hanko, to the *Covenant Reformed News*!

Many of Pastor Ron Hanko’s articles in volumes 1-8 of the *News* were published in his excellent book, *Doctrine According to Godliness* (£15). His other titles are *The Coming of Zion’s Redeemer* (£22) and *Saved by Grace* (£10), co-authored with Prof. Cammenga. Rev. Hanko has other books in the works. The CPRC Bookstore adds only 10% for P&P within the UK. Ordering information for those in the rest of the world (except the US and Canada) is on [www.cprc.co.uk/ordering-information](http://www.cprc.co.uk/ordering-information); we accept PayPal payments. Those in North America can acquire these books from [www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org).

## Rebaptism in Acts 19?

One of our readers has asked about these verses from Acts 19:

4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. 7 And all the men were about twelve.

His question is, “Is this not anabaptism? Can you explain or point to any articles addressing it? Would this mean that the baptized converts of John the Baptist were rebaptized with water by the apostles?”

I do not know of any articles addressing this question but have myself written the following in a manuscript of a book on baptism which is to be published by the CPRC, hopefully in late 2021.

Baptists understand the Word of God to be saying here that Paul rebaptized certain persons who had been baptized by John, though they are reluctant to say that Paul did this because he thought John’s baptism was illegitimate. After rebaptizing these people with water, he also laid hands on them so that they received the Spirit and spoke in tongues. He did this because they had not heard of the Holy Spirit.

This misreads the passage. The Baptist reading makes the pertinent part of verse 4 a quotation and then makes verse 5 a reference to what Paul did after he finished speaking. This is the Baptist reading of these verses (notice the quotation marks):

Then said Paul, “John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” When they [i.e., the disciples of John the Baptist to whom Paul is speaking] heard this, they [i.e., these same disciples of whom the apostle is speaking] were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

According to this Baptist interpretation, “they” in verse 5 refers to those to whom Paul was speaking and they were baptized with water by Paul in Jesus’ name, having been previously baptized by John. Reading the passage that way, it teaches rebaptism but it also suggests that John’s baptism was not really Christian baptism at all.

The passage should be read in the following way (again notice the quotation marks):

Then said Paul, “John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they [i.e., the people who came to John’s baptism] heard this, they [i.e., the same people who came to John’s baptism] were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

In other words, “they” refers to the people whom John baptized and verse 5 refers not to Paul’s rebaptizing of certain persons in Ephesus but to John’s baptism of certain people at the Jordan. It also identifies John’s baptism as Christian baptism, not as something that needed to be re-administered.

The proper reading of the passage, therefore makes verse 5 part of what Paul said to these Ephesian disciples and not a description of his rebaptizing them. Indeed, if this is the proper way to read the verse, then verse 5 is saying that John baptized them, the only time they were baptized, and did so in the name of the Lord Jesus, identifying John’s baptism with every other New Testament baptism.

Grammatically, this is the way to read the verse, since it is verse 6 that mentions Paul once again and continues the story of what he said and did with the word “and.” There is, therefore, no ground to be found for rebaptism in these verses, nor in any other passage of Scripture.

Rebaptism is, in fact, a denial of the great biblical truth that we can only be saved once. No one who believes in the sovereignty of God in salvation, in the redeeming power of Jesus, in the efficacy of the Holy Spirit’s work and in the perseverance of saints, ought to rebaptize, since water baptism is a picture of salvation and ought for that reason to be administered only once. The Reformed creeds state, “Therefore we believe, that every man, who is earnestly studious of obtaining life eternal, ought to be but once baptized with this only baptism, without ever repeating the same: since we cannot be born twice” (*Belgic Confession* 34) and “The sacrament of Baptism is but once to be administered unto any person” (*Westminster Confession* 28:7).

Christ accomplished His atonement once and for all (e.g., Heb. 10:10, 12, 14), and we are born again once and only once. Thus the Reformed faith rejects the errors of those “who teach that it is not absurd that one having lost his first regeneration is again and even often born anew. For these deny by this doctrine the incorruptibleness of the seed of God, whereby we are born again, contrary to the testimony of the apostle Peter: Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible (I Pet. 1:23).” (*Canons V:R:8*). Just as each of God’s children receives “one baptism” (Eph. 4:5)—a spiritual regenerating baptism by the Holy Ghost—so this ought to be signified and sealed by only one water baptism.

Let us note, however, that the usual interpretation of Acts 19:1-6 leads inevitably to the conclusion that John’s baptism was not (essentially) Christian baptism and that *all* John’s disciples would have needed to be rebaptized with water. This would have included Jesus and some of twelve as well. Yet not a hint of such rebaptism is suggested anywhere in Scripture.

What is more, if John’s water baptism was not Christian baptism, then John’s baptizing is of no value as far as determining the mode and subjects of baptism, nor is Christ’s baptism the same as ours. That leaves us with only a few other references to baptism in the New Testament. The Baptist, therefore, with his interpretation of Acts 19 puts himself in a dilemma.

*Rev. Ron Hanko*