

The Numbers of the Beast:
Guardrails in the Interpretation of Revelation 13:18 and 17:9–11
Thomas R. Shepherd
Andrews University

The Apocalypse is filled with symbols – a seven-headed red dragon, a woman standing on the moon, a sword coming from Jesus’ mouth and many others. These symbols are much the source of the beauty of the book of Revelation – representing grand, sweeping cosmic events in vivid unforgettable language. But these same symbols are also the bane of interpreters trying to piece together the underlying message God intends to convey through them. Symbols are flexible, malleable, and without proper controls, prone to widely diverse interpretation.

What controls or “guardrails” can narrow the field of options in interpreting the symbols of the Apocalypse? At first perusal the book may seem resistant to such guardrails with its rapid shift in scenes and striking contrast in symbolic representations. Indeed, it has been said that there are as many outlines of Revelation as there are interpreters. Nevertheless, carefully observing patterns in the visions and the rootedness of the book in Old Testament images and stories, one can begin to piece together an understanding of the great message of this book – the victory of God over the forces of evil with the central theme of worship – worshipping the Creator and the Lamb, the Lord Jesus, or worshipping the dragon and the sea beast.

The interpretation of Revelation 17 is particularly challenging. The beast described in verse 3 has seven heads and ten horns, just as the dragon in Revelation 12 has and the Sea Beast in Revelation 13 has. While the descriptions vary slightly there are more similarities than variation between these creatures.¹ The dragon and the Sea Beast cannot be the same entity since

¹ The dragon in Revelation 12 is red (12:3) like the beast in Revelation 17, and the dragon has seven heads and ten horns (12:3) like the beast in Revelation 17, but the dragon has seven diadems on its heads, while the beast in Revelation 17 does not. The Sea Beast in Revelation 13 also has seven heads and ten horns, but it has ten diadems

the dragon gives his throne and great authority to the Sea Beast (13:2) and furthermore all the earth worships both the dragon and the Sea Beast (13:3–4), indicating thereby that they represent separate entities though closely allied.²

But what does the scarlet beast of Revelation 17 represent, and the woman who sits upon it drunk with the blood of the saints (17:1–6)? The apostle does not leave any doubt about the evil nature of the woman and the beast. The woman is introduced as the great harlot (πόρνη 17:1). The kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality with her (πορνεύω 17:2). Those who dwell on earth have become drunk with the wine of her fornication (πορνεία 17:2). She is dressed in purple, scarlet, gold, a precious stone and pearls (17:4).³ She has a cup in her hand full of abominations (βδέλυγμα) and the impurities (ἀκάθαρτος) of her sexual immorality (17:4). Her name is Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth (17:5) and she is drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus (17:6). She is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth (17:18). There can be no doubt that this woman is evil.

While the beast is not described with as many characteristics as the woman, it is nevertheless portrayed as evil as well. The beast is scarlet in color (17:3), similar to the red dragon (12:3). As noted above, the beast has seven heads and ten horns (17:3) just as the dragon and the Sea Beast have (12:3; 13:1). This beast is also full of blasphemous names (βλασφημία 17:3). The infamous woman sits on this beast (17:3) so they are closely allied to one another. It is striking that throughout the Apocalypse the apostle gives striking and clear indicators as to which

on its horns (13:1). The beast in Revelation 17 has seven heads and ten horns but no reference to diadems (17:3). However, the ten horns are described as ten kings in 17:12.

² Historicists take the dragon to represent Pagan Rome since under its regime Herod tried to kill the baby Jesus (Matt 2, Rev 12:4–5). The Sea Beast is seen to represent Christian Rome particularly with the striking rise of the papacy over centuries.

³ The word for “precious stone” is singular in Greek as is the word for gold, perhaps suggesting that her attire is characterized by these adornments. The apostle Peter recommends inward adornment of a gentle and quiet spirit in place of outward adornment with gold, braiding of hair and the type of clothing one wears (1 Peter 3:3–4; cf. 1 Tim 2:9–10).

side of the Great Controversy the different characters are on. Clearly, the woman and the scarlet beast are on the side of evil against God.

Surely the apostle did not need to go to such lengths to indicate the evil nature of these two entities. But John likes hyperbole (cf. the description of the devil in 20:2, and the saints in 20:4). He piles up lists of character traits and actions to emphasize the stark contrast between good and evil. Bad is really bad, and good is sterling white. The descriptions fill out the play book and trajectory of the good and evil characters.

Thus, it is clear that the harlot and the scarlet beast in Revelation 17 are on the wrong side, the side of Satan, the side of evil, the persecutors of the people of God. Their final outcome will be destruction in fire (20:9–10, 15). But can we gain more clarity about their identity? And what do the strange depictions in Revelation 17:9–11 represent along with the words in 17:12–18?

Interpretive Guardrails

Interpretive guardrails for the Apocalypse include understanding the outline of the book and its chiastic structure centering on the Great Controversy vision of Revelation 12–14.⁴ The book has seven visions with parallel visions helping to interpret one another. In this chiastic structure of the book, the Fall of Babylon in Revelation 17–18 parallels the Seals in Revelation 4–8. The Seals have very clear parallels to Jesus' eschatological discourse in Matthew 24 which suggests that the Seals are a description of the church relating to the world as depicted from the time of the prophet John to the time of the End.

⁴ In each of the visions except the last there are series of seven items or messages. Not often recognized are the seven heavenly messengers in Revelation 14 and the seven shouts over the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18–19. All of the series of sevens break down into opposing pairs of 3 + 4 or 4 + 3 in a chiastic structure centering around the vision of Revelation 12–14. The odd absence of a series of seven items in the last vision is replaced instead by everything listed in twelves. The link between seven and twelve is hinted at by the breakdown of 3 + 4. Whereas seven is the addition of three to four, twelve is the multiplication of three by four.

Table 1
Chiastic Structure of Revelation's Visions

7 Churches 7 Seals 7 Trumpets Great Controversy 7 Plagues Fall of Babylon New Jerusalem

Center of Conflict

World warned

World Judged

Church in the world

Church called out

Church rebuked

Church redeemed

The Fall of Babylon then presents the final end of the evil world system with the church called to leave it behind by being faithful to God (18:4). The Fall of Babylon signals the redemption of God's people as displayed in the opposing reaction to the great city's fall by the kings, merchants and shipmasters (three sets of woes 18:9–20) and by the saints (four hallelujahs 19:1–8).

Another interpretive guardrail is the frequent allusion to Old Testament passages that in their own context help to illuminate and narrow the possible meanings of symbolic images in Revelation. The pure woman in Revelation 12 is often linked to the church in interpretation. However, this explanation has the challenge that the woman gives birth to Jesus Christ (12:5) and clearly the church did not give birth to Jesus. Jesus gave birth to the church.

But the Old Testament allusion in 12:1 helps to unravel this mystery. The woman is clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. It is reminiscent of Joseph's dream (Gen 37:9–11). The twelve stars in that dream (eleven plus Joseph, the twelfth) represent the twelve sons of Jacob, the sun represents Jacob himself and the moon represents Joseph's mother, Rachel. Thus, the Old Testament imagery indicates that the woman of Revelation 12 represents the true and faithful people of God.

The imagery of the evil woman in Revelation 17 and the blasphemous beast has ties to Isaiah 21, Jeremiah 25 and 51, Ezekiel 16, and Daniel 7. Isaiah 21:1–10 describes the fall of Babylon in dramatic terminology. Messengers come riding describing Babylon's fall (21:9; cf. Rev 14:8). Key to their message is the fact that all of Babylon's carved images lie shattered on the ground – Babylon's fall is due to its idolatry, false worship.

Jeremiah 25 describes God giving to all nations (including Judah and finally Babylon) the cup of His wrath for their evil ways. That cup of God's wrath makes the nations drunk and they stagger.

Jeremiah 51 describes God's wrath against Babylon because of its guilt against the Holy One of Israel (51:5). Babylon is destroyed because of its destruction of God's temple in Jerusalem (51:11). Babylon's fall is linked to its false worship of idols instead of worshiping the Creator (51:14–19). Tied together with this is vengeance against Babylon for its mistreatment of God's people (51:34–37, 47–49). False worship inevitably leads to false ethics, the mistreatment of people.

Ezekiel 16 describes in rather bawdy language both Israel and Judah as women who have gone astray in idolatry. The depiction is couched in the language of sexual immorality of a most signal nature, where a harlot pays her lovers instead of vice versa. Comparable to this is the book of Hosea where the prophet is told to marry a harlot who herself does not stay faithful to him after their marriage.

The linkage to Daniel 7 is similar to that found in Revelation 13 where the Sea Beast is a composite of the four beasts that arise from the sea. As noted above, just like the Sea Beast, the beast of Revelation 17 has seven heads and ten horns.

What can be drawn from these Old Testament backgrounds to Revelation 17? The harlot of Revelation 17 is a depiction of spiritual immorality – idolatry. Linked with this is the same type of false ethics seen in Jeremiah, where the harlot persecutes God’s faithful witnesses. In unforgettable imagery the harlot of Revelation 17 is said to be drunk with the blood of the saints. The ties to Jeremiah 25 and 51 suggest that spiritual Babylon is in view.⁵ The linkage to Ezekiel 16 and Hosea suggest that the woman on the beast represents God’s people gone astray into idolatry. The tie to Daniel 7 indicates judgment is taking place. God is judging false worship and the mistreatment of His people.

A Numerical Guardrail

One of the important questions about Revelation 17 is the relationship between the harlot and the beast on which she rides. Above it was noted that both entities are evil with multiple characteristics, names and symbols describing their malevolent character.

Helpful in determining the relationship between the harlot and the beast is a little noticed link between Revelation 13 and 17. Revelation 13:17–18 reads:

so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. ***This calls for wisdom:*** let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

Revelation 17:9–11 reads:

This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.

⁵ Cf. Jeremiah 25:15, 26; 51:7, 13.

The terminology highlighted clearly links these two passages but what does that linkage consist of? The apostle does not give more clues than what is in the text. He indicates that the one with understanding should calculate the number of the beast. That number is 666.⁶

Commentators differ widely regarding the meaning of the number 666 in Revelation 13:18. Gematria is typically utilized to determine the meaning of 666, with Preterists taking it as pointing to Nero through the transliteration (not translation) of the phrase “Nero Caesar” into Hebrew and then determining the numerological sum of the resulting Hebrew letters.⁷ The challenge for this position is transliteration into Hebrew instead of translation and the use of a title besides the name “Nero” to achieve the number 666.

Historicists link the number to the Latin phrase “Vicarius Filii Dei,” “vicar of the Son of God.”⁸ This identification has the advantage of not requiring transliteration, but it also is a phrase rather than a name. Furthermore, it does not appear on the pope’s crown as is commonly believed, but it does appear in the document known as the Donation of Constantine – a document used for centuries by the church to support its claim to temporal authority over large portions of present-day Italy (the Papal States). The phrase “Vicarius Filii Dei” does not appear in a vacuum.

⁶ There are textual variants in verse 18 regarding the number. The strongest support is clearly for 666 (P⁴⁷ A 051 205 209 1006 1611 1841 1854 2053 2329 2351 2377 Byz {P 046} it^{gig} vg syr^{ph, h} cop^{sa, bo} arm eth Irenaeus Hippolytus Andrew; Victorinus-Pettau Gregory-Elvira Primasius Beatus). Six hundred sixty-five is supported by manuscript 2344. Six hundred forty-six is supported by it^{ar} and 616 is supported by P¹¹⁵ C vg^{ms} mss^{acc. to Irenaeus}; Caesarius. Bruce Metzger notes that Irenaeus states that 666 is found “in all good and ancient copies” and is “attested by those who had themselves seen John face to face.” Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament* 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 676. The UBS text grades the reliability of the number 666 as an A which means that the text is certain. Below a notation will be made concerning intrinsic probability (what would the apostle likely have written) regarding 666 in relation to its connection with Revelation 17 that further supports 666 as the original number.

⁷ See David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16* WBC 52B (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 770. The phrase in Greek νέπων καίσαρ, transliterated into Hebrew נרון קסר with the resulting addition of numbers equaling 666. נ,50 = נ = 200, 666 = 200 + 60 + 100 + 50 + 6 + 200 + 50. 60 = ס, 100 = ק, 50 = נ, 6 = ו.

⁸ This phrase comes from the document known as the Donation of Constantine, a document shown in the fifteenth century to be a forgery. However, for hundreds of years the church used this document to support its claim to large portions of present-day Italy – the Papal States.

Rather the rest of the Donation of Constantine (known in Latin as the Donatio) contains amazing parallels to the wording of Revelation 13 as seen in the table below:

Table 2
Parallels between Revelation 13 and the Donation of Constantine

Verse	Revelation	<i>Donation of Constantine</i>
13:2	To it the dragon <u>gave his power and his throne and great authority</u>	<u>More than our empire and earthly throne</u> the most sacred <u>seat</u> of the Blessed Peter shall be gloriously exalted, we <u>giving to it power, and dignity of glory, and vigor, and honor imperial</u>
13:4	[the dragon] had given <u>his authority</u> to the beast	should obtain <u>from us and our empire the power of a supremacy</u>
13:7	authority was given it over <u>every tribe and people and language and nation</u>	<u>in the whole Roman world</u> priests should regard him as their head, as judges do the king. . . . <u>over all the churches of God in the whole earth.</u> . . . be more exalted than, and chief over, all the priests of the <u>whole world</u>
13:18	his number is <u>666</u>	<u>Vicarius Filii Dei</u> ⁹

The apostle takes great interest in numbers in the Apocalypse. The number seven is repeated often with series (7 Churches, 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets, 7 Plagues).¹⁰ The number twelve is also highlighted and has particular linkage to the New Jerusalem where everything is in multiples of twelve (12 foundations, 12 gates, 12 pearls, a wall 144 cubits high [12 X 12] with 144,000 linked to salvation in Revelation 7 and 14).

The number 666 is a very unique number. It is what is known as a triangular number.¹¹ Triangular numbers are the sum of a series of natural numbers starting with one and going upward (as in 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5, etc.). The reason these numbers are called triangular is that a series of round objects placed inside an equilateral triangle will follow this pattern of additive

⁹ The words Vicarious Filii Dei have the following values in Latin: i = 1, v and u = 5, l = 50, c = 100 d = 500. Calculating the values the phrase adds up to 666: 5 + 1 + 100 + 1 + 5 + 1 + 50 + 1 + 1 + 500 + 1 = 666.

¹⁰ There are also 7 thunders in Revelation 10:3–4 and there are 7 heavenly beings in Revelation 14:6–20 and 7 shouts over the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18:9–19:10 (3 woes and 4 hallelujahs).

¹¹ See Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 772. Aune does not think that 666 as a triangular number is an appropriate explanation of the linkage between Revelation 13:18 and 17:9–11 because it is tautological.

numbers for each row. The first row will have one object, the second row will have two objects, the third row will have three objects, and so on. The formula for triangular numbers is $Y = X(X+1)/2$, where Y is the total of the number of round objects enclosed within the equilateral triangle and X is the number of objects on one side of the triangle. The value of such an arrangement makes it easy to quickly determine the number of round objects by simply counting the number of objects on one side of the triangle and applying the above formula. For instance, with a triangle with five objects on one side of the triangle the total number would be $Y = 5(5+1)/2 = 15$.

The linkage to 666 is the fact that a triangle with 36 objects on one side has exactly 666 objects in the triangle. Not only that, but 36 is also a triangular number itself with 8 objects on one side. This may seem to have nothing to do with the book of Revelation. However, the number 666 appears in Revelation 13:18 and the number 8 appears in Revelation 17:11.

Furthermore, In Revelation 17:9–11 a series of numbers is given that adds up to 36 as follows:

The seven heads	7
are seven mountains on which the woman sits	+ 7
they are also seven kings,	+ 7
five have fallen,	+ 5
one is,	+ 1
the other has not yet come . . .	+ 1
as for the beast . . . it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven	<u>+ 8</u>
	36

That the Apocalypse has both the numbers 666 and 8 as well as a series that adds up to 36 implies quite strongly that John was intentionally utilizing triangular numbers in writing both chapter 13 and 17 of Revelation.¹² But why?

It may be that here is a numerical guardrail for the interpretation of Revelation 17. It would suggest that the beast referred to in Revelation 17 is the Sea Beast of Revelation 13 since the triangular numbers link the two.¹³ This may seem almost like a tautology (“the beast is the beast”), but it does narrow the possibilities as to what the beast of Revelation 17 can stand for.¹⁴

Furthermore, the word play on the numbers 7 and 8 in Revelation 17:9–11 has its basis in the triangular numbers. What does this mean? It is not hard to see that the “seven hills” have a clear linkage to Rome since the city is built on seven hills and reference to this is made in the literature of the time period.¹⁵ Furthermore, on the woman’s forehead is the phrase “Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth” (17:5) and at the end of the chapter the woman is identified as the city of Rome itself (17:18) in the terminology “the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

¹² Interestingly, a triangular number appears in the Gospel of John as well, John 21:11. The number 153 as the number of fish caught in the miracle when the seven disciples meet Jesus. The number 153 in a triangle has 17 items on a side. However, interpreters are unsure of the meaning of this triangular number. But what it does show is that John had an interest in such numbers. One further possible note about the unique value 666 is that the angles in an equilateral triangle are each 60 degrees (totaling 180 degrees for the triangle). If one were to think of a triangle in rough measurements rather than 60 degree angles in each corner, one could speak of 6 rather large degrees. Then the three 6’s would be like 666. Furthermore, a circle has 360 degrees. Again, in rough measurements it could be represented by 36. These unique qualities may have been of use to John in his writing of the Apocalypse.

¹³ The triangular number linkage between Revelation 13 and 17 indicates quite strongly that from the perspective of intrinsic probability (what the author would likely write) the most likely reading in the textual variant in Revelation 13:18 is almost certainly 666, just as the external data suggests.

¹⁴ Contra Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 772.

¹⁵ See Juvenal *Satires* 9.130; Propertius 3.11.57; Horace *Carmen saeculare* 5; Ovid *Tristia* 1.5.69; Pliny *Hist. nat.* 3.66–67; Claudian *Bell. Gild.* 104; *VI cons. Hon.* 617. Some interpreters argue that Revelation 17:9 does not refer to the seven hills on which Rome is famously built because the term used in Revelation is ὄρος which typically refers to mountains. However, as BDAG, 725 points out “n Eng. diction what is considered a ‘mountain’ in one locality may be called a ‘hill’ by someone from an area with extremely high mountain ranges; similar flexibility prevails in the use of ὄρος, and the Eng. glosses merely suggest a comparative perspective;” So ὄρος can refer to a hill and the fact that “Babylon” sits upon these hills or mountains and is identified as “the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth” (Rev 17:18), makes it quite certain that Rome is being referred to.

Thus we assert that the beast of Revelation 17 is the Sea Beast of Revelation 13, but since the beast in Revelation 17 appears in the eschatological section of the book and the description in Revelation 17–19 portrays end time events (e.g. the fall of Babylon) it is safe to say that in Revelation 17 the Sea Beast has progressed further in its rebellion against God (see the discussion below). More details are depicted regarding the meaning of the seven heads and the ten horns in chapter 17 than in chapter 13, even though the exact identification of these has been a conundrum for interpreters.

Do the five of the seven kings that have fallen refer back in time to the enemies of God's people – Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece? As noted above, the Sea Beast of Revelation 13 is a composite of the beasts of Daniel 7. No Historicist interpretation of Daniel 7 includes Egypt and Assyria, so it seems strained to bring in Egypt and Assyria to make up the five kings that have fallen. But if the seven heads stand for the total of the heads of the beasts in Daniel 7 (Lion, one head, bear, one head, leopard, four heads, the terrifying beast, one head) it seems impossible that John is describing those nations since five fallen would bring us partway through the leopard beast.

What to make of this I am not completely sure except that the terminology in Revelation 17:10 of “five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come” sounds suspiciously like the phraseology used to describe God the Father in Revelation 4:8, “Who was and is and is to come.”¹⁶ G. K. Beale argues “Since the threefold name for God refers to his existence throughout history, so the application of the formula to the beast's heads connotes the same transtemporal existence. Therefore, the seven kings are figurative for kings throughout history, through whom

¹⁶ Cf. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 871, “This three-part description reflects the ironic threefold expression applied to the beast in v 8 [Rev 17:8], which was a parody of the threefold divine name in 1:8; 4:8; 11:16; 16:5.”

the beast acts.” This type of argumentation is typical of Idealists (of whom Beale is one) and discounts the rather specific numbers involved in the description in 17:9–11 with five of the kings, or kingdoms, having fallen. If John were arguing for transtemporal existence, why use such terminology? It does not seem reasonable.¹⁷

Preterists argue that John is referring to a number of emperors, five of whom have died, one is and another yet to come. But they argue over just who these emperors might be since there were more than seven during the first century.¹⁸ Historicists, instead, speak of broader kingdoms rising and falling in rebellion against God. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece are favorites for the five fallen, as noted above, though this faces the challenge of the depictions in Daniel 7 and the lack of Egypt and Assyria being referenced there.

The important question is what John means by “the one is” in verse 10 when speaking of the seven horns as kings or kingdoms. This determines where John is placing this vision historically. If it refers to Pagan Rome then the five kings or kingdoms that have fallen must be before that time (thus Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece). But a further key concerning this question is the description of the beast in verses 8 and 11. In verse 8 the angel says to John, “The beast which you saw was and *is not* and is about to arise from the bottomless pit and goes to destruction.” In verse 11 the angel says, “The beast which was and *is not* is also an eighth and is from the seven and goes to destruction.”

What is odd is that the beast “is not” but the sixth head, a sixth king or kingdom, “is.” So, what can this mean? Let us start with the seven heads or kings. If we start the seven heads with

¹⁷ Beale argues “The number ‘seven’ is not a literal number designating the quantity of kings in one epoch but is figurative for the quality of fullness or completeness, as in the OT, particularly Daniel 7, and throughout the Apocalypse, where ‘seven’ or ‘seventh’ occurs about forty-five times outside of 17:3–11 (e.g., 1:4, 20; 4:5; 5:6; 12:3; 13:1–2), all in clearly figurative expressions.” Beale, *Revelation*, 869. But such a perspective does not explain the division into five, one and one.

¹⁸ See David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22* WBC 52C (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 946–47.

Babylon and follow a typical Historicist perspective on the kingdoms represented in Daniel 2, 7 and 8, then the five kingdoms that have fallen would be Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Pagan Rome and Christian Rome (the papacy).¹⁹ So the sixth head would be consistent with the time period of the Sea Beast after the deadly wound in Revelation 13:3 is healed. Before describing the seventh head, consider the beast of Revelation 17.

That the beast is described as “is not” fits with the deadly wound of the Sea Beast in Revelation 13:3. That the beast “is about to arise from the bottomless pit” (17:8) would be consistent with the healing of the deadly wound (13:3). The beast going to destruction (17:8, 11) is consistent with an end time defeat of the beast power by the King of Kings (19:11–21), also depicted in Revelation 18.

But how does this fit with the seven heads where five have fallen and one is and one is yet to come (17:9–11)? The language of verse 11 is helpful here. The beast is an eighth but “is from the seven.” What this suggests is that when the beast arises from the bottomless pit (17:8) it is actually filling the role of the sixth head/king/kingdom that “is.” That is to say, this sixth head and the beast arising from the bottomless pit *both* represent the Sea Beast of Revelation 13 after the deadly wound is healed.

What is the seventh head? In this scenario it makes sense that it refers to the Sea Beast in its end time expression forcing worship on earth dwellers and passing the death decree on the saints (13:15–17). As Revelation 17:8, 10–11 indicates, this experience for God’s people will not be long because the beast “goes to destruction” and as the seventh head “remains a little while.”

The woman sitting on the beast in Revelation 17 is clearly identified as “Babylon the great” (17:5) and as “the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth” (17:18), clearly

¹⁹ Admittedly, this redefines the total number of heads in Daniel 7 as seven different kingdoms, whereas in Daniel 7 the four heads of the leopard all refer to Greece.

a reference to Rome. The beast she sits on is the Sea Beast of Revelation 13 in its end time expression. The beast and the woman are a further development of what pagan Rome stood for – defiance of God and rebellion against His Word and persecution of His people. This is just what the depiction in Revelation 17 portrays with the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and the portrayal of gross sexual immorality representing idolatry. The woman is vile in contrast to the pure woman in Revelation 12 (the pure people of God) and this leads to the argument that the woman in Revelation 17 is a depiction of the people of God gone wrong, cooperating with and in league with the evil forces of earth in rebellion against God particularly seen in the end time. Here is a combination of secular and religious power in rebellion against God and His will with the concomitant persecution of the people of God.

At the end of the chapter ten other kings are referenced who desolate the woman. This depiction is clearly eschatological in nature fulfilling the will of God in punishing the confederation between religion and secular power. One can speculate as to just who these ten kings or kingdoms represent, but it may be futile to do so. The ten horns are linked to the last beast power in Daniel 7 that has ten horns, so it is possible that the ten kingdoms represent the powers of Europe that grew from the remnants of the Roman Empire.

In summary then, the beast of Revelation 17 is the Sea Beast of Revelation 13 but after the healing of the deadly wound, and further, at the end of time when church and state combine to force worship. The vile woman represents the people of God gone wrong in league with secular power to persecute the saints. The five fallen kings represent Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Pagan Rome, Christian Rome up through the deadly wound. The sixth king represents Christian Rome after the healing of the deadly wound and the seventh king represents this same power in its final rebellion against God at the end of time, a rebellion that will fail with the King

of Kings victorious. The ten kings may represent the powers of Europe in an eschatological scenario opposing the linkage of religious and secular power as depicted in the vile woman and the beast. Babylon will fall. The people of God will go free. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords will be victorious!