

**Revelation 6: 3-8; Part 3 of "The 4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse",
Sermon # 56 in the series - The Faithful and True Witness,
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on May 6th, 2007 in the
Afternoon Worship Service.**

I would like to go on to try to establish the truth of this interpretation which I have given to you, about the Seals of this chapter being related to the Pagan Roman Empire. If we will remember that those prophecies which have been given to us in the book of Daniel chapter 2 and Zechariah chapter 1, are meant to be the basis of our having a better understanding of what specifically is being spoken of in the book of Revelation in regard to Chapter 6, then I think that we can begin to conceive of what these words are saying. Jesus Christ went forth conquering and to conquer on the white horse of His gospel being preached by His Church. There then came a definite strategy of Satan to attack and suppress, and to extinguish it if possible. Satan wanted to destroy the truth of the gospel and the truth of the Word of God, and the beauty of what Jesus Christ has done and does do in salvation, saving men and women and children from their sins. This attack would be made through the Roman Emperors. Many of them would oppose, in every way that they could, the spread of the gospel. Our God, and our Christ would respond to this opposition by sending out the red horse, the black horse, and the pale horse to "take away peace from the earth." These prophecies are related to the particular ways that our God and our Christ acted and judged the Roman Emperors and their Empire in relation to this specific period of time, not to the whole Church age in general. This will become more apparent as we go farther into the details of these visions. While it is true that God brought all three of these kinds of judgment to other societies and times, during Church history, I believe that it is very apparent that it was this time period from 97 A.D. to 323 A.D. in which these kind of judgments were the most pronounced. They characterize this time period more than all others. What I want to do this afternoon is to relate to you some of the actual facts of the history of Pagan Rome to prove, as far as we can, that this is what these horses and their riders refer to, here in Chapter 6.

As I have been reading this week, in the history of the Pagan Roman Empire, I was staggered by the wealth of information that I came across which related scenes which speak about the cruel acts of the Emperors of that day. I will only be able to relate a few of the many accounts of sinful cruelty and the judgments which came as a result. I urge you to pick up and

read books like Foxe's book of Martyrs, The History of the Christian Church by Phillip Schaff, The History of the Church by Eusebius, the writings of Lanctantius, one of the Ante-Nicene Church fathers. There are many more that I could list but I will not. I have been using several commentaries which I believe are very helpful to understanding these things. One is James Durham's *Commentary on the Book of Revelation*. (1658) Another is Alexander Mcleod's *Lectures on the Principal Prophecies of the Book of Revelation*.(1814) I hope that perhaps you will find time to read these well written Commentaries of the book that we are studying. I want to begin by taking you back to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. This afternoon I want to tell you about the 1st of the 10 notorious persecuting Roman Emperors - Nero. And as I speak about what he was like, I want also to make mention of the conduct of Christians under his rule. I want to show you just how great the faith was of the Christians of that day, how great the grace of Christ was toward them that they should endure so much for His name's sake. Then next week I will attempt to give you more of an over view of the following 8 persecuting Roman Emperors. And then, when I finished with them I will relate to you a short history of the final persecuting Emperor, Diocletian, and the other men that he appointed Emperors under him, who brought the worst persecution of all, and which leads to the opening of the 5th seal and the cry of the martyrs from under the altar, "How long, O lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

So with the remainder of my time- Let me make mention of the 1st of the Persecuting Emperors - Nero.

I believe that these prophecies in Chapter 6 relate specifically to the Roman Empire and to the times after John wrote. But we do understand that the beginnings of the advance of the gospel, preached by the Church, took place before that time period. Christ was crucified under Roman authority. Peter and Paul were both martyred at Rome under Nero before the destruction of Jerusalem. Whereas the Jews, up until the destruction of Jerusalem were the major persecutors of the Church, now the Roman Emperors took over from them in their systematic oppositions and persecution of Christians. Nero was the first. He was a very cruel and barbarous man. In some ways he is the model and pattern of all who were to follow. He ruled over Rome from 64-68 A.D. John Gilles in his *Accounts of Revival* records Tertullian as saying, "We glory in such an author of our persecution: anybody who knows him may understand that nothing but what is eminently good could be condemned by Nero." Gilles goes on to say, "He was a prince of such brutish and extravagant manners,

as their own writers scruple not to call him a beast in human shape, the very monster of mankind." He had his own mother put to death for not supporting him in his decision to divorce his wife Octavia so that he could marry Poppaea Sabina whom Foxe calls, "a beautiful and notorious woman who was a proverb for vanity and evil living." With his mother out of the way he then did divorce his wife, had her sent to an island, and had her put to death there. "After this he married Poppaea and gave himself up to the wildest and most reckless course of life." Let me quote a little more from Foxe- "Throwing aside the state and dignity usually maintained by a Roman Emperor, Nero would descend into the arena and mingle with the gladiators, or professional fighting men, sometimes even taking part in the bloody scenes enacted there." "This delighted the rabble, who crowded the tiers of seats in the great circus and shouted their approval, but the nobility turned with disgust from the spectacle of an emperor so degrading himself." "Caring only for the applause of the mob, Nero used every means to extort money from the rich and spent it in wasteful extravagance." "A huge palace was built called the Golden House because of its splendid decorations." "This magnificent structure was of great size and surrounded by gardens, lakes, baths, and pleasure grounds." "Now at last, said Nero, I am lodged as an Emperor should be."

"In order to get money to complete this palace, accusations were brought against many rich men of Rome, who were put to death, and their property was taken by the Emperor." "His hatred and cruelty seemed especially directed toward the higher classes." "Seneca, the philosopher, Nero's former teacher and adviser, was accused, and chose to die by his own hand, by bleeding to death in a warm bath, his wife dying in the same way." "So common did it become for men to receive a message sentencing them to death that they searched for easy ways of dying, so as to escape the public executioners." "About this time, a terrible fire broke out at Rome, which destroyed six of the fourteen quarters, or districts of the city." "For six days the fire burned furiously, and scarcely had it died down when another fire began in the opposite direction." "Many ancient temples, monuments, and works of art were ruined by the flames." "The people were panic-stricken and believed that the fire had been started by the emperor for the mere pleasure of seeing it burn." "It was said that when the flames were at their height, he went up into a tower and sat there, looking down upon the burning city while he played upon his harp, and sang of the burning of Troy, saying I would that I might see the ruin of all things." "But becoming alarmed at the hatred he had aroused in his people, and finding his throne endangered, Nero hastened into the streets, and with a free hand

scattered money among the crowds until his treasury was empty." "Then, with characteristic cruelty and cunning he undertook to divert the attention of the angry mob from himself by leading them to wreak their vengeance upon helpless and innocent victims." "He therefore accused the Christians of having set fire to Rome, and ordered them to be hunted down, slain, and tortured in such a variety of horrible ways as awakened the pity of even the heartless Romans themselves." He covered Christians with the skins of wild beasts, and then set savage dogs upon them to bite them and tear them to pieces. He wrapped others up in tar and fastened them to poles in his own garden and set them on fire while he and his slaves and courtiers watching the blazing of these "torches" as he called them.

What was the Christian response to Nero's persecution? It was to bear it bravely when called upon, and to go to the catacombs to worship secretly in. Foxe says, "In those dark days the Christians had no churches and dared not meet in public, so they tried to find some secret places where they could gather together without being disturbed." "Now it happened that just outside the city of Rome there were deep tunnels or caves in the rock, called catacombs, which had been dug long before to get stone for the building of the city." "The rock had been hollowed out into many galleries, with here and there a vaulted chamber, where several passage-ways crossed or met." "Slaves and convicts worked in these places, and they became known to the Christians as a safe place to hide." "In that day every Christian was a missionary." "The soldier tried to win recruits for the heavenly host; the prisoner sought to bring his jailer to Christ, the slave girl whispered the gospel in the ears of her mistress; the young wife begged her husband to be baptized, that their souls might not be parted after death; every one who experienced the joys of believing tried to bring others to the faith." "Thus the numbers of Christians rapidly increased." "It began to be noised abroad that there was in Rome a secret society which worshipped an unknown God." "The rulers, who believed respect for the ancient gods was necessary to the safety of the state, became alarmed and issued orders aimed against the Christians, forbidding secret meetings." "Thus it came about that when any public calamity--pestilence, fire, famine, or flood--appeared it was blamed upon the Christians, who it was supposed, had brought down the anger of the offended gods." "Then came cruel laws, riots and commotions, and the terrible cry of 'Christians to the lions!'" "This was raised by the mob and resounded through the streets of Rome."

"Combats to the death between trained fighting-men called gladiators, or between prisoners of war, slaves, criminals, and wild beasts, were the favorite amusements of the Romans." "The emperor who could give the

people the greatest number of these bloody entertainments was the idol of the populace." "An immense stone building, or circu, called the Colosseum, was begun by Vespasian and finished by Titus, in which to hold these great shows." "Its ruins still stand, and amaze the traveler by their huge size and massive strength." "Tier above tier, sloping backward from around a level central space or arena, rose seats for nearly 100,000 spectators" "The outer wall was almost circular, filled with arched and pillared openings, and mounted storey upon storey to the height of 160 feet." "In length the Colosseum was 612 feet and in breadth 515 feet." "To the Colosseum flocked the populace of the greatest city in the world, to witness scenes of cruelty and bloodshed." "The Emperor himself, beautiful ladies of rank, haughty senators and nobles, as well as all the rabble of the mighty city, crowded the seats ranged around the arena and gazed pitilessly down upon men being stabbed to death by human adversaries, or torn to pieces by ravenous lions and tigers, let loose from the dens under the walls." "It is recorded that when the Colosseum was finished and first opened to the public, the games continued one hundred days, and that 5000 wild beasts, brought from all parts of the then known world were slain." "It was into this blood stained arena that many of the early Christians were brought, to suffer death in its most terrible forms.

Foxe concludes his analysis by saying, "But persecution could not diminish the ever-increasing flow of converts." "It served indeed, to make their numbers greater, for , to the Christian, death was but the beginning of eternal happiness." "They therefore welcomed it almost with joy, and the sight of their cheerful countenances as they were led to execution, astonished the lookers-on, and made many inquire what this belief could be that seemed to rob death of its terrors." "Thus a desire was awakened in hundreds of troubled hearts to share in the consolations which the new faith afforded believers."

Well, what can I say to by way of application after hearing all of this? I think that I can begin by saying that you and I need to remember the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 3: 10-14. "But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra--what persecutions I endured." "And out of them all the Lord delivered me." "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." "But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." This is the nature of sin as it works in evil men who come into positions of power. They will grow worse and worse. But notice that with the dear Apostle, that the Lord delivered him

out of all his persecutions. I do not think that this is reason to believe that we shall not die when we experience persecution. We may. Paul did, a little later, in Rome. He was beheaded under the reign of Nero. But I think that there is every reason to believe that the Lord Jesus draws near to the soul of the each believer who dies in persecution, in such a way, that he will truly believe that whether he lives or whether he dies that Christ's power will sustain him and His powerful presence will cause him to know deliverance from the power of Satan and the malice of men. Oh how we need to believe this today! Let us understand that there have been many Christians who have gone before us in this matter of suffering unjustly. They endured their sufferings in such a way that others knew that it could only be the grace of the Christ that they spoke of, which could sustain them in their sufferings. May each of us have the grace to learn from these Christians "who have borne the heat and the burden of the day." We will speak more of them next week.