

Doctrine of Nero

1. Michael Grant in his book *The Twelve Caesars* provides an interesting perspective of Nero.

“Nero never at any time enjoyed the highest of all priorities -- administrative work. He was far more interested in the circus and theatre, and in singing, acting, dancing and writing poetry ... Nero loved the stage and circus so utterly and unrestrainedly that he longed to devote himself to them with systematic, professional thoroughness. The emperor also aspired to be a poet; and his poetry was not necessarily as poor as ... reported. Nero’s voice was ‘small and rusty’, or ‘weak and husky’ as a modern translator prefers to render it ...

Nero lived a self-indulgent life. When he was a very young man this took the form of rowdily rushing round the city at night. He himself, on occasion, returned from some of these excursions covered with bruises; and thenceforward, in order to prevent this from happening again, he was accompanied on his nightly wanderings by escorts of guardsmen and gladiators ...

Nero also wasted a great deal of time at excessively long and lavish dinner parties. He was not, it is true, either a glutton or a drinker ... All the same, allowing for an occasional break for diving into a warm pool, or, if it was summer, into a bath that had been cooled by snow, his dinners sometimes lasted for twelve hours from midday until midnight.

Moreover, if one-tenth of the tales are true, his varied sexual activities must have encroached on his time still further. All emperors were the targets of an infinite amount of sexual gossip. But in Nero’s case the rumours reached unprecedented heights or depths: and they credited him with a remarkable versatility. He was said to have gone to bed not only with perfectly normal, good-looking young women, but also with his mother Agrippina, with men older than himself, with eunuchs and with young boys including Britannicus ... while graffiti on the walls of Pompeii include an inscription by a male prostitute alleging that he personally served Nero’s lust on four occasions ...

Indeed the emperor was said to have assured his friends that it was all nonsense to suppose that anyone in the whole world was sexually chaste or pure, in any part of his body whatever; he added, why this had ever been believed of anyone was because they managed to hide what they were doing ...

In 59, hearing how offensively his mother Agrippina was speaking of him ... he became convinced not only that she was sneering at his beloved artistic life, but that she was actually plotting his downfall ... Nero became so upset by her attitude that he finally arranged to have her killed.

The picturesque method he chose, involving the employment of a collapsible ship in the Bay of Naples ... failed in its purpose, since the ship carrying Agrippina duly fell to pieces out at sea, she herself succeeded in jumping into the water and reaching a boat and subsequently the shore. Whereupon her son sent two naval officers who slew her in her bed.

Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, the future emperor Nero ... reigned from A.D. 54 to 68 ... Nero found himself abandoned by ... the praetorian guard, and on 9 June 68 he was compelled to commit suicide.”

2. The 1996 *Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia* has summarized the life of Nero.

“Nero Claudius Caesar, who ruled Rome from AD 54 to 68, was one of its most infamous emperors. Born on Dec. 15, AD 37, he was the son of Domitius Ahenobarbus and Caligula's sister AGRIPPINA II. After Agrippina married Emperor CLAUDIUS I, she induced him to adopt Nero.

When Claudius died, the Praetorian Guard and the Roman Senate hailed Nero as the new emperor. Nero pledged cooperation with the Senate, announcing the beginning of a new golden age. Agrippina vied for influence and power, however, with the prefect of the Praetorian Guard, Burrus, and with Nero's former tutor, the philosopher SENECA. The first victim of the ensuing plots and counterplots was Claudius's son, Britannicus, who was poisoned in 55. Nero resented Agrippina's interference and had her murdered in 59. Burrus died in 62, and Seneca retired the same year.

From 62, Nero ruled unrestrained. Having divorced and murdered his first wife, Claudius's daughter, Octavia, Nero married (62) Poppaea Sabina, an ambitious intriguer. In 62 he revived the wide-ranging law of treason, and people were executed on suspicion of offense. In 64 a great fire ruined Rome. Nero lavishly rebuilt the city, but rumor held that he had started the fire himself to make room for his new palace and that he had recited poetry while watching the blaze. To avert this suspicion Nero blamed the Christians for the fire, thus initiating the first major Roman persecution of that sect. Executions increased in 65, when an assassination plot was uncovered. The poet Lucan, Seneca, the famous general Corbulo, and numerous other senators lost their lives.

Nero's great passion was art. He scandalized Roman society by displaying in public his talents as a chariot driver, singer, and musician. In 67 he toured Greece; the Greeks held numerous games and awarded Nero all of the first prizes for his racing and musical performances in honor of his visit. As Nero devoted himself to artistic pursuits, the reins of power slipped from his hands. In 68 the governors of three provinces rose in an open revolt.

When the Praetorians also deserted him, Nero committed suicide on June 9, 68. The historian Tacitus and the biographer Suetonius present a lurid picture of his reign.”

3. Interestingly, the death of Nero at the hands of the Praetorian Guard, just after the execution of the apostle Paul may have been connected. Many have conjectured that

since Paul was such a favorite of the Praetorian Guard, the execution may have precipitated the forced suicide by the unpopular and eccentric Caesar.