

3 The Second Letter of Clement

Rev Dr Jos M. Strenght, Alexandria School of Theology, Class 4, 2010-11

1.1 Introduction to 2 Clement

1.1.1 Background of the letter

Why was this letter written?

> **Together read and discuss:** 2 Clement 1:1-5. What does this introduction suggest about the purpose of 2 Clement?

2 Clement is clearly not a letter, but a sermon. It could be written for a worship service (17:3), but also as part of catechism. (Pre-baptismal class?)

The sermon uses Isaiah 54:1 (see 2 Clement 2:1) to call for repentance and a radical Christian lifestyle. It may also be responding to some Gnostic influence because it focuses on the physicality of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection. (9:1-5)

1.1.2 History of documents of the letter

Only three copies of 2 Clement are known:

- The oldest existent document is found in the *Codex Alexandrinus* (but only 1:1-12:5a).
- The oldest complete Greek copy is found in the *Codex Hierosolymitanus*.
- There is a Syriac translation as part of a publication of the New Testament (1169-1170).

1.1.3 Importance of the letter in the early church

In antiquity this document must have been popular in the churches, though we have no proof of this in quotes in other documents. But if it was not respected, how could it be accepted as part of the post-Biblical materials as copied in

- the *Codex Alexandrinus*? 1 Clement and 2 Clement stand there immediately after Revelation.
- Also in the Syriac manuscript (1169-1170), 1 Clement and 2 Clement stand after the catholic letters and immediately before the letters of Paul.
- *The Apostolic Canons* lists 1 Clement and 2 Clement as part of the New Testament.

In spite of this importance of the letter, we know virtually nothing about the occasion, the author, or the date of writing.

1.1.4 Who was 'Clement'?

All modern scholars agree that 2 Clement is not written by the same writer as 1 Clement. In antiquity, Eusebius (picture) already seemed to throw doubt on the idea that the same Clement wrote this letter. In his *History of the Church* 3.38.4, writes:

[It] must be observed also that there is said to be a second epistle of Clement. But we do not know that this is recognized like the former, for we do not find that the ancients have made any use of it.

Eusebius does mention a letter that bishop Dionysius of Corinth received from pope Soter in Rome (*History of the Church* 4.23.11). Some have suggested that 2 Clement is this 'lost letter'.



Three major theories have been put forward about the original 'setting' of the sermon:

- Because in the collections the letter is connected with 1 Clement, which was sent from Rome to Corinth, it may have been part of a collection of Corinthian letters. Do the sports contests (7:1) refer to the Isthmian games in Corinth? Was this a sermon that was spoken in Corinth by those who had delivered 1 Clement to Corinth, after the successful resolution of the problems there?

- But then, it could also be a letter that was part of a *Roman* collection of letters, attached to the genuine letter of Clement (and maybe to other documents).
- The third option often mentioned is that the letter was written in Alexandria, because of its anti-Gnostic 'tone' and because it quotes from the Gospel of the Egyptians that was also used by Clement of Alexandria.

1.1.5 Date of the letter

As we do not have certainty about the writer and where this written, and as the sermon itself does not give many clues as to circumstances, dates from 95-170 AD have been suggested.

1.2 Content of 2 Clement

1.2.1 List of the morality of Clement (right and wrong)

> **Together read and:** 2 Clement 4:1-5; 6:1-6; 15:1-3; 16:1-17:2

Take a sheet of paper and divide it in two columns. In the right column you write very precisely (use terminology of Clement) all things mentioned as bad, and in the left column all things that are mentioned as good.

1.2.2 The Gospel according to 2 Clement

> **In groups read and discuss:**

- a) 1:1-8; 2:7-4:5; 5:5; 6:7-9 (note what he says on baptism)
- b) 7:4-6; 8:1-8; 9:1-10 (notice the strong anti-Gnostic language)
- c) 10:4-11:1; 11:6-12:1; 16:1-4
- d) 17:1-7; 18:2; 19:1,3-4; 20:1-4

Share in class what you found as groups.

1.2.3 Clement's gentile environment

Clement says: 'Our minds were blinded, and we worshiped stones and wood and gold and silver and brass, things made by humans; indeed, our whole life was nothing but death.' (1:6) Thanks to Gods mercy, 'we do not sacrifice to dead gods...' (3:1)

> **Read and discuss:** 2:1-7; 13:3-4.

1.2.4 Christ and the Spiritual Church

> **Read together and discuss:** 14:1-5. Do we have an idea what Clement is talking about? How does he allegorize?

1.2.5 Father, Son and Holy Spirit in 2 Clement

What do we learn from 2 Clement about the Church's view of the Trinity?

> **Together read and note** how Clement describes Father, Son and Holy Spirit: 1:1-8; 2:7; 3:1; 6:7 with 8:4; 9:5; 9:11; 13:4; 17:4; 20:5.

2 Clement 14:1-5 should be included in this list, but not before good exegesis is done.

1.2.6 Holy Scripture in 1 Clement

> **Together read:**

- 2:1- verse from Isaiah 54:1 is quoted as 'God speaking'. 2 Clement often quotes Old Testament
- 2:4 - a passage from Mathew 9:13 or Mark 2:17 is called Scripture. The sermon contains many quotes from the Gospels (but not John) and also from letters of the New Testament. It is, however, not always clear whether he quotes those sources or whether he uses language that was common in the Church.
- 4:5-5:4; 8:5; 11:2-4 - source of quotes unknown

- 12:2 – source unknown; a shorter version is cited by Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 3.13.92) and he attributes it to *Gospel of the Egyptians*. A longer version is found in the *Gospel of Thomas* 22.

1.3 Lessons of 2 Clement

1.3.1 How does this sermon help shape our knowledge of Church history?

> Discuss

1.3.2 How does 2 Clement shape our view of Bible and tradition?

> Discuss

1.3.3 How does Clement help us today in Egypt?

> Discuss