

Why Was Clement Not Raptured?

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THE QUESTION POSED IN THE title refers to *Clement of Rome* (first century) and not to *Clement of Alexandria* (second century). There were two different Clements living a century apart. Our focus here will be on the first-century *Clement of Rome*.

Both futurist and preterist critics of the first-century Rapture wonder why Clement of Rome was not caught up at the Parousia in AD 66-70. They raise this objection because they think he was still alive as a bishop of the Roman church in AD 95, which was almost 30 years after the Parousia and Rapture in AD 66.

So, their denial of a first-century Rapture is based on **three assumptions**: (1) This Clement is the same co-worker of Apostle Paul mentioned in Philippians 4:3, and (2) He was still alive in AD 95, and (3) His two epistles (*1 & 2 Clement*) were not written until AD 95.

The **first assumption** has lots of historical and biblical support going all the way back to the first century. For instance, according to P. F. Beatrice, *1 Clement* is “unanimously ascribed to Clement of Rome” (*Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*). Thus, it is almost certain (if not in fact) that the Clement of Rome who wrote these two epistles was indeed a co-worker of Apostle Paul.

And it is that close association with Paul in AD 63 which tends to negate **the other two assumptions** about Clement still being alive and writing his two epistles in AD 95, which would have been more than thirty years after Paul was martyred. Why was there such a long, silent gap?

But when we examine the *internal* evidence in his two epistles, it seems far more likely that he wrote soon after the death of Paul (late 63) and shortly before the Parousia began in AD 66.

Clement Was Not Still Alive in AD 95

Some early Christian writers under the influence of the Roman Church claim that Clement of Rome was still alive and was the third bishop (pope) of Rome in AD 95. But that theory is suspect for several reasons. And it is not just preterists who say that.

There are many conservative Protestant historical scholars (futurists) who question or deny the veracity of the Roman Catholic dogma of *Apostolic Succession* and an *unbroken list of bishops* in the Roman church during that first generation after AD 70.

That theory appears to have been either *fabricated* by the later Roman Church hierarchy (historical revisionism, interpolation) or historically *misplaced* by them in order to support their ecclesial power structure at an earlier date (i.e., the late first century).

Furthermore, Ignatius and Polycarp (AD 110 and afterward) seem to quote or allude to *First Clement* as if they considered it as almost having apostolic authority, implying that *First Clement* had been around for several decades before they wrote, and as if they considered it as belonging to the generation of the apostles before AD 70. So, it seems unlikely that they would have held *First Clement* in such high esteem if it had only been written a decade earlier (AD 95) by one of their contemporaries.

This means that we do not have any solid unquestionable EXTERNAL testimony at the mouth of two or more credible eyewitnesses coming from that first generation after AD 70 to support the late AD 95 date. But we do have trustworthy INTERNAL evidence coming from Clement's two epistles which decisively points to an early pre-70 date, and that is why our focus here will be on the much weightier internal evidence.

Post-70 Date Challenges ALL Full Preterists, Not Just the Rapture Preterists

Paul said that Clement's name was in the *Book of Life* (Phil 4:3). That necessarily implies that **he was a true Christian**. Thus, it is clear that Clement could not have been left behind if he was still alive when the Rapture occurred (AD 66).

So, if his two epistles had been written in the last decade of the first century (AD 92-100), then it would mean that a true Christian and fellow-worker of Apostle Paul remained on earth after the Parousia, Resurrection, and Judgment without any awareness of those events having occurred. And instead of claiming the fulfillments and documenting those events, as we would have expected, Clement instead asserts that those events are **still future**. Do you see the dilemma this poses for us full preterists?

If Clement and any of the other pre-70 saints who witnessed the Parousia and experienced all the things that Jesus and the apostles told them to expect were still on earth after the Parousia, they would have

known that the Parousia had taken place. They would have been dancing in the streets and shouting from the rooftops – *anything but silent about it or unaware of it!* The fact that not a single pre-70 Christian shows up after AD 70 to mention the Parousia as a past event is challenging to all Full Preterists who do not hold to the Rapture view. But that silence is exactly what we Rapture preterists would expect to find if there was a Rapture.

So, if Clement was still alive and wrote his two books in AD 95, then he not only missed the Rapture, but ALL of the other endtime events as well (Parousia, Resurrection, Judgment, etc.). And that would not only prove that a Rapture did not take place in AD 66, but also that all of the other endtime events failed to occur as well. *And that would falsify ALL of Full Preterism, not just the Rapture view!*

Thus, there is far more involved here than just the problem of Clement missing the Rapture. If his two books were written after AD 70, then he missed the whole complex of eschatological events! And that is a critical dilemma for ALL full preterists.

Post-70 Date Also Falsifies Futurism

Furthermore, futurists don't get a free pass either. They have just as much skin in the game as we preterists do. Think about this.

Clement not only says that the endtime events are **still future** but also that they were **very imminent** and “*about to*” happen. He uses the Greek word *MELLO* 13 times (seven times in 1 Clement and six times in 2 Clement). But since the endtime events obviously did not happen *soon after* AD 95, it discredits Clement as a **false prophet** and renders his two epistles worthless as evidence against full preterism.

And it discredits those pre-70 saints who *supposedly* lived through the endtime events and still remained on earth after the Parousia. They would have known that the endtime events had occurred and would have claimed the fulfillments. Why didn't they speak up and set the record straight when they heard Papias, Polycarp, and Ignatius teaching that the Parousia was **still future**?

Their silence about what they had just experienced at the Parousia totally discredits their Christian faithfulness and would imply that the Parousia really did not occur after all. And it would make Jesus and the apostles **false prophets**. That is why R. C. Sproul, Sr. declared: “*If Jesus is a false prophet, my faith is in vain*” (“The Problem of Imminency” speech at the 1993 Cov. Esch. Symposium).

Something is desperately wrong with our interpretations of Bible prophecy when our assumptions about the date of writing imply that Jesus and the apostles were false prophets. That would overthrow the faith of ALL Christians, including futurists.

Dating Clement Before AD 70 Is the Solution

We full *preterists* cannot abide with the endtime events being “**still future**” after AD 70, nor can *futurists* allow the endtime events to be very imminent and “**about to**” happen in AD 95. So, there is a lot at stake here for ALL futurists and ALL preterists – not just for the Rapture preterists. And the way to resolve this dilemma for both futurists and preterists is to re-date Clement’s epistles before AD 70.

If it can be shown that Clement wrote before the destruction of Jerusalem, then the historical dilemmas for both futurism and preterism are vaporized. And we can easily do that by examining the eschatological statements in Clement’s epistles and comparing them with the eschatological statements in our New Testament to demonstrate that *1 & 2 Clement must have been written about the same time as the later New Testament epistles (before AD 70)*.

Internal Evidence Which Supports the Early Date

Clement taught that the temple was still standing in Jerusalem, and sacrifices were still being offered there at the time when 1 & 2 Clement were written. This alone, if we had nothing else, is enough to date these epistles **before AD 70**:

1 Clem 41:2 Not just anywhere, brothers, are the **continual daily sacrifices offered**, or the freewill offerings, or the offerings for sin and trespasses, but **only in Jerusalem**. And even there the offering is not made in any place, but **in front of the sanctuary at the altar**, the offering having been first inspected for blemishes by the high priest and the previously mentioned ministers. [Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Third Edition]

He also wrote not long after both Peter and Paul had been martyred, when the persecution was intensifying (AD 64) and a vast multitude of the elect had been killed. This sounds like the Neronic persecution had just begun:

1 Clem 5:1 But to pass from the examples of ancient times, let us come to those champions who **lived nearest to our time**. Let us consider the noble examples that **belong to our own generation**.

1 Clem 5:2 Because of jealousy and envy the greatest and most righteous pillars were persecuted and fought to the death.

1 Clem 5:3 Let us set before our eyes the good apostles.

1 Clem 5:4 There was **Peter**, who because of unrighteous jealousy endured not one or two but many trials, and thus having given his testimony **went to his appointed place of glory**.

1 Clem 5:5 Because of jealousy and strife **Paul** showed the way to **the prize** for patient endurance.

1 Clem 6:1 To these men who lived holy lives there was joined a **vast multitude of the elect** who, having suffered many torments and tortures because of jealousy, set an illustrious example among us.

1 Clem 6:2 Because of jealousy **women were persecuted** as Danaids and Dircae, suffering in this way **terrible and unholy tortures**, but they **safely reached the goal** in the race of faith and **received a noble reward**, their physical weakness notwithstanding. [Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Third Edition]

1 & 2 Clement Have Same Perspective as the New Testament

Furthermore, in the careful analysis of *1 & 2 Clement* by the committee members of the Oxford Society of Historical Theology in their now-classic but still-valuable 1905 book entitled, *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, A. J. Carlyle convincingly shows that *1 & 2 Clement* were aware of and were written after *Ephesians*, *Hebrews*, and *1 Peter* (AD 62-63). This would allow a date no earlier than 63.

Moreover, it is extremely significant that *1 & 2 Clement* use the same kind of eschatological *imminency* language in the same *frequency* and *intensity* as those last few New Testament books that were written in the last five years before the Jewish War (AD 61-66). For instance, compare the eschatological uses of the Greek word ‘*mello*’ (“about to occur”) in both Clement and the New Testament:

Usage of ‘*mello*’ in Clement

1 Clem 24:1 Let us consider, dear friends, how the Master continually points out to us the **resurrection about to be** [Gk *mello*] of which he made the Lord Jesus Christ the first fruit when he raised him from the dead.

1 Clem 28:1 Since, therefore, all things are seen and heard, let us fear him and abandon the abominable lusts that spawn evil works, in order that we may be shielded by his mercy from the **judgments about to come** [Gk *mello*].

1 Clem 42:3 Having therefore received their orders and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and full of faith in the word of God, [the apostles] went forth with the firm assurance that the Holy Spirit gives, preaching the good news that ***the kingdom of God was about to come*** [Gk *mello*].

2 Clem 5:5 Moreover you know, brothers and sisters, that our stay in this world of the flesh is insignificant and transitory, but the promise of Christ is great and marvelous: rest in the ***about to come*** [Gk *mello*] ***kingdom and eternal life!***

2 Clem 6:3 This age and ***the [age] that is about to come*** [Gk *mello*] are two enemies.

2 Clem 18:2 For I myself am utterly sinful and have not yet escaped from temptation; but even though I am surrounded by the tools of the devil, I make every effort to pursue righteousness, so that I may succeed in at least getting close to it, because I fear ***the judgment about to be*** [Gk *mello*].

2 Clem 20:2 Let us have faith, brothers and sisters! We are competing in the contest of a living God, and are being trained by *the present life* in order that we may be ***crowned in the life about to come*** [Gk *mello*].

[Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Third Edition]

Usage of 'mello' in the New Testament

Acts 17:31 because He has fixed a day in which He is ***about to judge*** [Gk *mello*] ***the world*** in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

Acts 24:15 having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there is ***about to be a resurrection*** [Gk *mello*] of both the righteous and the wicked.

Acts 24:25 But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and ***the judgment about to come*** [Gk *mello*], Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you."

Rom 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with ***the glory that is about to be*** [Gk *mello*] ***revealed to us.***

Eph 1:21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in ***the [age] about to come*** [Gk *mello*].

2 Tim 4:1 I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is ***about to judge*** [Gk *mello*] the living and the dead, and by **His appearing and His kingdom**:

Heb 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who are ***about to*** [Gk *mello*] ***inherit salvation***?

1 Pet 5:1 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of ***the glory that is about to be revealed*** [Gk *mello*]

See also: Heb 2:5; 6:5; 10:27; 13:14; James 2:1; Rev 3:10; 12:5.

Note the amazing similarity between Clement and the New Testament! Clement spoke of the *Resurrection, Judgment, the Kingdom, eternal life, and the age to come* as being “*about to occur*,” just like the New Testament writers did. No preterist can be comfortable with that “*about to occur*” imminency language coming from a true Christian who lived through the Parousia and wrote afterward! It would mean that either Clement totally missed the Parousia when it happened OR that the Parousia did not occur in AD 66-70. But neither of those two options are acceptable to the full preterist. Therefore, 1 & 2 Clement must have been **written BEFORE AD 70**.

Range of Probable Dates for Clement

We have seen that Clement’s two epistles exhibit all the characteristics of having been written at a time when –

- the temple was still standing
- sacrifices were still being offered
- Peter and Paul had recently been killed
- persecution was rapidly intensifying
- Clement was aware of *Ephesians, Hebrews, and 1 Peter*
- the eschatological events were “*about to occur*”

So, this provides a very tight range of probable dates for *1 & 2 Clement*. The earliest would be soon after Paul and Peter were martyred (late 63 and early 64), and the latest would be either just before or right after the beginning of the Neronian persecution (June–August 64). This places *1 & 2 Clement* somewhere **between late 63 and late 64**.

Conclusion

We have seen that the external evidence for the AD 95 date is unsustainable in view of the absolutely decisive internal evidence pointing to an AD 64 date. This means that all of Clement's statements about the endtime events being **still future** and **about to happen** must apply to AD 70 and not to AD 95. And that completely discredits the futurists' use of Clement against Full Preterism, as well as fellow preterists' use of Clement to deny the Rapture.

Thus, since Clement's two epistles were written near the beginning of the Neronian persecution in AD 64, and since he did not show up after AD 70 to write anything or claim that the endtime events had occurred, then it implies that Clement was either killed in the Neronian persecution soon after he wrote his two epistles or that he somehow escaped the persecution and remained alive until the Parousia, at which time he would have been **changed and taken to heaven** with the rest of the living elect saints. ✝