

Romans (2)
Paul's Salutation (1:1-7) (cont.)

Introduction:

Let us turn to the opening verses of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. We will read **Romans 1:1-7** in the English Standard Version.

Today is the second Lord's Day to which we will give our attention to this preface of this longest epistle of Saint Paul. We stated last week that Paul's primary purpose in these opening verses was *to show himself to be an authoritative apostle who was making known the realization of the Old Testament salvation hope of Israel in Jesus Christ*. In these first few verses Paul shows forth Jesus, the Son of David, as the One through whom the promises of God to Israel are realized. Paul understood and declared that the promised age for Israel had arrived through the enthronement of Jesus Christ as the Son of David upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

I. Paul's Salutation (1:1-7)

First, we read that...

A. Paul introduced himself (1:1) *"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God..."* Paul identified himself as the writer of the epistle and then proceeded to describe himself to be a committed and submitted servant to His Lord. But as we also pointed out last Lord's Day, this was also a statement of *Paul's apostolic authority*. He was representing Jesus Christ, speaking on His behalf, as a servant of the Lord.

Upon mentioning the "gospel", then...

B. Paul described this "gospel of God" (1:2-3a)

1. The gospel of God, *"which He promised beforehand through His prophets"*
2. The gospel of God, *"which He promised... in the Holy Scriptures"*
3. The gospel of God, (was) *"concerning His Son"* (1:3a)

And then upon mentioning "His Son",...

C. Paul wrote "concerning His Son" (1:3b-4)

¹Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³concerning *His Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh* ⁴and was declared to be *the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord*,...

We addressed this in a measure last Sunday, but I would like us to spend a few more minutes today considering Paul's description of our Lord.

Paul describes Jesus Christ as God's Son. But actually Paul sets forth Jesus Christ as the Son of God in two different ways.

(1) Jesus Christ is the eternally begotten Son of God, the Second Person of the blessed holy trinity. This is what is set forth in the expression, “concerning His Son” in verse 3.

(2) Jesus Christ is “the Son of God” as the enthroned Son of David, having been designated God’s Son as King David’s promised son, who was promised to rule over the restored kingdom of Israel.

In other words, with respect to His *essence*, Jesus Christ was (1) the *eternal* Son of God (who became incarnate in Jesus Christ). With regard to his *position*, Jesus Christ is the enthroned son of David, who is also (2) the *adopted* Son of God. Paul refers to the essence of Jesus Christ as the Son of God in verse 3; he refers to the position of Jesus Christ as “the Son of God”, the Son of David, in verse 4.

With regard to our Lord’s *essence*, He is the one, eternal, sovereign God. The Son of God ruled with His Father from eternity, until the time when He clothed Himself in His human nature, and came into the world. Our Lord spoke of His eternal authority, when He spoke to His troubled disciples.

⁶⁰When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”

⁶¹But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? ⁶² Then what if you were to see *the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?* (John 6:60f)

And later, when Jesus was praying to His Father the night that He was betrayed and arrested, we read of our Lord’s request to His Father: “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with *the glory which I had with You before the world was*” (John 17:5). When our Lord Jesus rose from the dead, this request was granted the Son of God. The Father glorified His Son with the glory that He had with Him before the world was.

But with respect to the human nature of our Lord Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth had never had such a *position* of glory prior to His exaltation on the day of the resurrection. On that day God exalted the man Christ Jesus with honor and authority that He had never known. The God/Man, Jesus Christ, was given all authority in heaven and earth. Jesus of Nazareth was crowned and enthroned because He was David’s promised Son, whom God had promised that He would raise from the dead and give Him glory.

God had promised long before Jesus was born that He would enthrone a son (descendant) of David over His people Israel, and that He would then regard David’s son as His own Son, who would rule over His people on His behalf. This is found in a number of places in the Old Testament. But the promise of God in **2 Samuel 7:12-16** and the declaration of **Psalms 2:7** are most pertinent here.

(1) **2 Samuel 7:12-16**

Let us consider some background information to assist our understanding of this passage.

New Testament Christians commonly call upon God as our Father. That we have this privilege and permission from God to do so is taught and reinforced throughout the New Testament. Recognize, however, that this was a new way in which the people of God related to their God. The believers prior to the coming of Jesus Christ did not call upon God as Father, that is, as individuals, although they did regard God as Father to God’s “son”, which was the nation of Israel. However--and this is important—there was an exception to this. For there was a situation in Old Testament times when some individual persons were adopted by God and thereafter personally call God Father. God had declared to King David that He would adopt the descendant of King David, when he ascended the throne on the day of his coronation. On the occasion that a son of David was coronated, God adopted him as His son. His son was to rule thereafter on behalf of God his Father. The rule of David’s son would thereby be understood as a co-regency, a co-rule, with David’s son, who was God’s son, ruling on behalf of God his Father over Israel.

The king's power and legitimacy are supported by the theory that he is the divine representative of the God, called and enthroned by him, and given authority as his deputy among men.

This relationship between “a god” as father and his “son” ruling on his throne on earth was a common concept in the ancient world.

Both in Egypt and in Mesopotamia the king is held to be the son of the deity. In Egypt the case is conceived physically and metaphysically; the king is the product of a physical act of generation by the god incarnate [strikes of Mormonism!—Lars]. In Mesopotamia also, where the adoption idea is the prevailing one, the king's filial relationship may be represented in mythical forms, as the result of a divine begetting or as a birth of the new sun god on the unknown mountain of the east. Both in Egypt and in Mesopotamia the god addresses the king with the adoption formula, ‘thou art my son’. In Egypt this also includes the literally implied ‘I have begotten thee’.

That such expressions, when they are sometimes met with in Israel, are there formed on alien patterns, is seen, among other things, from the fact that phrases which were originally intended to be taken literally have in Israel been transformed into expressions of adoption: ‘Today have I borne you’. This conclusion is obvious from the fact that the expression ‘I have borne you’ is originally to be imagined as spoken by a female deity. In Israel it is turned into a saying of Yahweh (i.e. Jehovah).¹

In 2 Samuel 7 we read of God's intention to adopt a Davidic son. God promised David a dynasty; a descendant of David would always sit upon the throne ruling over God's people, Israel.

Here is the setting for 2 Samuel 7: God had given King David rest from all of his wars. David was at peace in Jerusalem. David desired to build God a house, a temple, in which He could dwell among His people. King David had built himself a great house, but God still dwelt in the tent that Moses had made long before. So David purposed to build God a house. But God told David through the prophet, Nathan, that he would not build Him a house. Rather, God said that He would build David “a house.” And what God meant by that was that He promised that David would have a descendant who would always be seated on David's throne to rule over Israel on behalf of God. In God's promise and commitment to David, God used the language of *adoption*. David's son would become God's son. That is, upon the coronation of David's son, God would regard that son from then onwards as His own son, over whom He would guide and protect. The son of David was to rule the kingdom of God, that being the nation of Israel, on behalf of God his “Father”, his adoptive Father. God made this commitment to David in 2 Samuel 7 that He would adopt David's son as His own son, assuring the new king of God's presence, power, and blessing. God said to David,

¹²“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴***I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.*** [This is the language of adoption] If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. ¹⁵But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.”” (2 Sam. 7:12-16)

And so, on the day of coronation of King David's son becoming king, God pronounced David's son as His Son, using the language of adoption. It was as though God had begotten that son of David on that very day that he became enthroned. God had brought him forth. God had determined that he would reign. God would see to it that He would endorse His adopted son, establish His rule, and expand its power and its reach, that is the power and reach of his kingdom.

¹ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (Eerdmans, 2004), p. 54. We would not assert that Israel “borrowed” or derived its ideas from other lands; it simply shows that a filial relationship between a people's god and king was a common concept and claim in the ancient world.

It was by way of adoption that David's son, Solomon, who succeeded him, was called "the son of God." We read of King David turning over the reign of his kingdom to his son, Solomon.

Then King David rose to his feet and said: "Hear me, my brothers and my people. I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD and for the footstool of our God, and I made preparations for building. ³But God said to me, 'You may not build a house for my name, for you are a man of war and have shed blood.' Yet the LORD God of Israel chose me from all my father's house to be king over Israel forever. For he chose Judah as leader, and in the house of Judah my father's house, and among my father's sons he took pleasure in me to make me king over all Israel. ⁵And of all my sons (for the LORD has given me many sons) he has chosen Solomon my son to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel. ⁶He said to me, '***It is Solomon your son who shall build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father.*** ⁷I will establish his kingdom forever if he continues strong in keeping my commandments and my rules, as he is today.' (1 Chron. 28:1-7)

Now, beside 2 Samuel 7, we may see God's promise to David's Son in Psalm 2:7.

(2) Psalm 2:7

Psalm 2 is sometimes called a Royal Psalm. This psalm was sung on the day of the coronation of a son of David. Some say that it was sung annually on a high feast day in which the enthronement of the king was rehearsed and reaffirmed.

The day of the king's enthronement (his anointing), was a festival laying the foundation for the future of the people. As far as we can see, the king's enthronement was celebrated each year in a feast not only in Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, and the other Eastern empires, but also in Israel.²

I will read Psalm 2 for us.

Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?
²The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,
³"Let us break Their bonds in pieces
And cast away Their cords from us."
⁴He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The Lord shall hold them in derision.
⁵Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,
And distress them in His deep displeasure:
⁶"Yet I have set My King
On My holy hill of Zion."
⁷"I will declare the decree:
The LORD has said to Me,
***You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.***
⁸Ask of Me, and I will give You
The nations for Your inheritance,
And the ends of the earth for Your possession.
⁹You shall break them with a rod of iron;

² Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (William B. Eerdmans, 2004), p. 60.

You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.””

¹⁰Now therefore, be wise, O kings;

Be instructed, you judges of the earth.

¹¹Serve the LORD with fear,

And rejoice with trembling.

¹²Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,

And you perish in the way,

When His wrath is kindled but a little.

Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.

The God-inspired writers of the New Testament understand this psalm to be a prophecy of the events that took place in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. First, the opening verses of Psalm 2 were seen as prophetic of the evil designs of Jewish and Gentile leaders to crucify Jesus (2:1-3). We read that this is the case in **Acts 4:25** and **26**. This passage in Acts records the apostles Peter and John returning to the gathered believers after having been threatened to preach no more the name of Jesus. They lifted up their voices to God in prayer, saying:

Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, Who by the mouth of Your servant David have said:

‘Why did the nations rage,
And the people plot vain things?
The kings of the earth took their stand,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the Lord and against His Christ.’

For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

The apostles declared that the psalmist's description of the raging nations and the vain things plotted by the people was a prophecy of the effort of **Jews**, principally their leaders, in alliance with the **Romans**, to put to death Jesus, the Son of God. Their roaring and railing against Jesus was unreasoned and unjustified. Further, we see that their rebellion had been unified against Jesus. Their mutual opposition toward Jesus brought former enemies together so that together they could put to death the Son of God. But notice in Acts 4:26 that the gathered disciples not only spoke of the guilt of those who crucified Jesus, but they also acknowledged that **God had decreed all that had transpired respecting the death of Jesus**. They **“were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done”** (Acts 4:26). God had purposed the rejection of His Son by these Jewish leaders; nevertheless, the Father raised David's Son, who was also His Son by adoption, who was also His Son respecting His deity, and the Father enthroned Him on David's throne over Israel His people, with authority over all flesh, in order to bring His people salvation and to destroy those enemies of God who refused to submit to His reign.

Now let us return to examine other details of **Romans 1:3** and **4**.

¹Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³concerning His Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴and was declared to be the Son of God in power **according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,...**

God declared Jesus to be the Son of God in power **“according to the Spirit of holiness”** (1:4b). The expression, **“according to the Spirit of holiness”**, is in parallel with the expression, “according to the flesh” in verse 3. The meaning of this phrase may be the most difficult phrase in this passage. One commentator wrote:

This brings us to the third and most difficult question: What is the meaning of “according to the Spirit of holiness”? This phrase is the antithetical parallel to “according to the flesh” in v. 3. We may then explore this question by assessing the meaning of the contrast. Although a bewildering variety of views are found, they fall into three basic categories.³

What are these various interpretations?

(1) Some propose that this meaning of “according to the flesh” in verse 3 and “according to the Spirit of holiness” in verse 4 is **a contrast between Jesus’ human and divine natures**. One speaks to His humanity and the other speaks to His deity. This is not likely, however, because the phrase, “the Spirit of holiness” is never used in the Scriptures to depict the deity of Christ.⁴

(2) Some propose that “according to the Spirit of holiness” refers to **“the obedient, consecrated spirit that Jesus manifested throughout His earthly life.”**⁵ The contrast, then, would be that “according to the flesh” in verse 3 describes Jesus’ outward and physical qualifications as the descendant of David, but the “according to the Spirit of holiness” of verse 4 refers to his inward, spiritual perfection that qualifies Him for His exaltation to reign over the kingdom of God. However, in Paul’s writings when he contrasts “flesh” and “spirit”, it is never with this internal and external idea.

When Paul contrasts “flesh” and “spirit”, he most often is contrasting two ages, or two eras are set against one another; the old era was dominated by sin, death, and the flesh is contrasted to the new life in Christ, “in the spirit”, characterized by righteousness, new life, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

(3) Some take the idea just described and understand **“according to the flesh” in verse 3 as Jesus’ existence during His lifetime on earth from the incarnation to Calvary, and “according to the Spirit of holiness” in verse 4 to describe His existence upon and after His resurrection**. This is most likely what Paul intended to communicate in these verses.

I would argue that the specific point of contrast is the redemptive-historical disjunction of the old age and the new age... The resurrection of Christ inaugurates the new age. When Jesus lived on earth as the Son of David, he lived his life in the old age of the flesh that was characterized by weakness, sin, and death. At his resurrection, however, Jesus left the old age behind and inaugurated the new age of the Spirit... His resurrection signals that the new age has begun... The saving promises made to the nation have become a reality in and through the true Israel, Jesus the Messiah.⁶

Next we read in verse 4 that God’s Son was declared to be the Son of God in power... **“by His resurrection from the dead”** (1:4c). It was upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ that God the Father exalted His (eternal) Son and installed David’s Son, as His Son (by adoption). And so, again, Jesus is the Son of God in two senses, as the eternal “Son of God”, and as David’s Son who is exalted to the position of “Son of God” as King over all.

Everything antecedent in the incarnate life of our Lord moves toward the resurrection and everything subsequent rests upon it and is conditioned by it.⁷

³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (William B. Eerdmans, 1996), p.

⁴ This interpretation would also necessitate the Greek word, τοῦ ὁρισθέντος, to be translated “demonstrate” or “manifest”, which is not likely.

⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 45.

⁷ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1968), p. 12.

Paul then inserts the name of Jesus once again: He “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 1:4). God’s Son is “*Jesus Christ our Lord.*” Paul affirms that Jesus Christ is currently the Lord, the sovereign Ruler over the world and history. “For Paul, ‘Lord,’ expressing both Jesus’ cosmic majesty and his status as master of the believer, is the single best title to express the true significance of Jesus.”⁸

D. Paul wrote of his service to “Jesus Christ our Lord” (1:5, 6)

“...Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵*through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name among all the nations,* ⁶*including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ...*”

1. “Through whom we have received grace and apostleship” (1:5a)

It is commonly understood that though Paul used a plural subject, “we”, he was speaking in an editorial manner. In other words, Paul was speaking only of himself, not others. It was through Jesus Christ that Paul was given grace, which enabled him to serve as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Here “grace” is the grace of apostleship.

2. “To bring about the obedience of faith” (1:5b)

This is an important expression, “the obedience of faith.” Paul uses it again at the close of the epistle:

²⁵Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about *the obedience of faith*-- ²⁷to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Rom. 16:25-27)

There are different ways that this expression, “the obedience of faith”, is interpreted.⁹ In recent years some have sought to redefine faith as the same as obedience. They say that faith is obedience and obedience is faith. But this is wrong. Faith must not be equated with obedience; rather, obedience should be seen as the evidence of faith, the outworking of faith. Faith, rightly understood, will always be seen in obedience; biblical obedience to the Lord Jesus will always be born from faith.

We understand the words “obedience” and “faith” to be mutually interpreting: obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience. They should not be equated, compartmentalized, or made into separate stages of Christian experience. Paul called men and women to a faith that was always inseparable from obedience—for the Savior in whom we believe is nothing less than our Lord—and to an obedience that could never be divorced from faith—for we can obey Jesus as Lord only when we have given ourselves to him in faith. Viewed in this light, the phrase captures the whole dimension of Paul’s apostolic task, a task that was not confined to initial evangelization but that included also the building up and firm establishment of churches.¹⁰

⁸ Moo, p. 50.

⁹ Grammatically, the genitive relationship, “obedience of faith”, may be translated in a number of ways: as an objective genitive, “the obedience to the faith”; subjective genitive, “the obedience that is born from faith”; appositional genitive, “the obedience which is faith.”

¹⁰ Moo, pp. 52f.

Paul did not want his readers to believe his message only. He desired that they would so believe his message that they would give their lives to obedience to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

3. “For the sake of His name” (1:5c)

All that Paul desired for his ministry and all that he desired for the church at Rome were ultimately for the glory of the Lord Jesus. “For the sake of”, that is, for the benefit of, for the furtherance of the cause of Jesus Christ.

4. To bring about the obedience of faith “among all the nations” (1:5d)

This describes the world-wide scope of Jesus’ kingdom. The nation of Israel was to bring the nations to see and submit to the glory of God. The nation of Israel, God’s “son”, had failed in its mission. Paul was called to be an apostle to further the realization of God’s purpose being realized in His Son, the true Israel, the Son of God.

5. “Including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ” (1:6)

Paul wanted this church at Rome to recognize that God was working in them to bring about His purposes to glorify the name of the Lord Jesus among all the nations. Paul was also establishing the fact that their Christian faith, their church in Rome, was within the sphere of Paul’s apostolic commission that their risen and enthroned Lord had given him. Paul was both broadening their understanding of who they were in Christ while at the same time asserting his apostolic authority over them. He was, in effect, commending the authority of his epistle to them at the outset of his writing.

Paul described them as “called” and that they “belong” to Jesus Christ. Paul shows them that they had been the objects of God’s sovereign work of saving grace and that God had designs to use them for wonderful and glorious purposes.

B. Paul describes his letter’s recipients (1:7)

⁷*To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 1:1-7)

1. Paul identifies his readers

(1) “To all those in Rome”

Paul addressed the Christians at Rome. Although Paul wrote to “all those” Christians who were in Rome, there was probably only one local church at this time in this city.

(2) “Who are loved by God”

They are loved by God. Not all are loved by God, although God loves, or rather, is loving toward all. God even “loves” His enemies, that is, He is kind, merciful, and gracious, even to those who sin in defiant rebellion against Him. But God has a covenantal love, a deep affection for those that are in Jesus Christ. Because of their union with His Son, whom He alone loves deeply and fully, He loves them who are in Christ with that same love. Jesus prayed to His Father:

“I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:26)

(3) “And called to be saints”

Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy claims only few Christians have arisen to the stature to be called “saints.” This is foreign to the teaching of God’s Word. All Christians, every Christian, is a true saint, as much as anyone who has ever lived and has had faith in Jesus Christ.

The word “saints” literally means “sanctified ones” or “holy ones.” We are saints by position, in that we are set apart by God unto Jesus Christ for Himself. We are also called to live consistent with what God has called us. We are saints; we should strive to live as holy ones before our God.

2. Paul greets his readers

(1) “Grace to you and peace”

The greeting of “grace to you” was a common way in which Greeks would greet one another. Paul desired God’s favor and blessing upon the recipients of his letter.

The greeting of “peace to you” was a common greeting of the Jews to one another. When our Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples the night of His resurrection, He greeted them, “Peace unto you” (Luke 24:36). Our Lord infused this expression with new significance. He pronounced peace between God and His disciples.

The peace of God is one the greatest of His gifts to His people. Actually, the peace of God spoken of in Scripture comes in two forms:

a. All Disciples of Jesus Christ enjoy an *objective* peace with God

This is a state of peace which exists between God and all of His people. Paul wrote of this: “He (Christ) is our peace.” Prior to coming to Christ God was not at peace with us, but rather a state of war existed. We were against Him in our thoughts, attitudes and actions. And He was against us. We were His enemies and were objects of His wrath. But through the death of Christ on our behalf, God was appeased, or propitiated. His justice having been satisfied, He established a state of peace with us through the blood of His Son. All true Christians are in this state of peace, although not every true Christian may be aware of his/her blessed condition.

b. All Disciples of Jesus Christ *may* enjoy a *subjective* peace with God.

This is a feeling of peace or well-being which God bestows upon His people. Not all Christians do always experience this peace, but all may. Philippians 4:6, 7 describe this subjective peace.

In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6)

Whereas *objective peace is in the realm of fact*, nothing changes this fact: God is at peace with His people due to Christ, *subjective peace is in the realm of feeling*; any number of factors may cause one’s sense of peace to increase or diminish--whether or not one is prayerful or prayerlessness, obedient or disobedient, believing or unbelieving, knowledgeable or ignorant.

In Paul’s greeting, he expressed his desire that the Christians in Rome enjoy in increasing measure this subjective peace. We then see that this peace comes...

(2) “From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”

Both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who share in their rule as Father and His Son, may grant grace and peace to their people.

Psalm 2

The historical setting of the Psalm

Psalm 2, although written a thousand years before the birth of Jesus Christ, sets forth the Lord Jesus quite graphically as the risen enthroned Lord. The New Testament makes this clear. But the psalm had a historical setting and context.

King David, the second king of Israel, penned this psalm (cf. Acts 4:25). David reigned for 40 years around 1010 – 970 BC. He was the greatest of Israel's kings. He was described as a man after God's own heart. And what that means is that when David ruled as king, he did so according to God's will; he didn't rule according to his own will, but rather he sought to rule on behalf of God. All kings after David were measured by the standard that he had established.

David was not only a king; he was also a musician and a poet. He wrote perhaps as many as 80 Psalms that are included in the collection of 150 that we have in our Bibles. David may have composed this psalm to be sung at the coronation of his son, on the occasion that he would become king of Israel. This psalm was certainly used in this fashion for a number of centuries after David as each of his descendants ascended to take their place on David's throne. On the day of the enthronement of a descendant of David, the people of God would sing this psalm in celebration of the king being coronated..

The psalm, when written, reflects the time when Israel was a prominent kingdom in the region. David ruled over Israel itself. But Israel also ruled over many of its neighboring nations. God had given great victories to David. God had expanded his kingdom greatly, conquering and subduing David's enemies before him. The nations once conquered came under the protection of David. These nations would render tribute to David and His kingdom. They would be committed in their allegiance to him and his throne. And David in turn provided security for them. If they were attacked, then David would defend them. If famine struck, then David would provide for them. As long as they served him, he used his authority to benefit them.

But rebellion breeds in the heart of all of Adam's offspring. And it was not in their hearts to serve David or his sons who reigned after him. These nations, although living peacefully and prosperously under the rule of David, would attempt to break free of Israel's authority, if the opportunity afforded them. Such an occasion might arise upon the death of Israel's king. During the often tenuous and tumultuous months that followed, while the son sought to solidify his own power and authority in Israel, nations would attempt to break free. And so, the transition of authority from one king to another was a difficult time. And this psalm appears to have been written and sung on coronation day for two purposes during these difficult times. ***First, the psalm encouraged the new king that indeed God Himself had chosen him to rule over His people Israel.*** This, then, would reinforce before others present that his rule was legitimate and his kingdom would be established; God would see to it. The psalm expressed great hope and optimism regarding the new king's rule. ***The second purpose would be to warn Israel's vassal nations that they should not attempt to rebel.*** And no doubt embassies from the various subservient kingdoms would be present on the day the new king ascended his throne. And this psalm sung in their presence would serve as both a warning and a promise for those nations that it would do them well to reaffirm their allegiance and their commitment to serve Israel's new king.

Let us consider the details of this psalm in the light of its historical context. The structure of the psalm is in four parts. ***First*** we read of ***the rashness of the nations*** in verses 1-3. ***Second, the response of the Lord*** (vs. 4-6). Third, ***the king asserts his divine appointment*** (vs. 7-9). Finally, we read ***the recommendation of the psalmist*** (vs. 10-12).

A. The rashness of the nations (2:1-3)

2:1 – Why do the heathen rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?

- 2:2 The kings of the earth set themselves,
 And the rulers take counsel together,
 Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying,
 2:3 “Let us break their bonds in pieces
 And cast away Their cords from us.”

The psalmist asks a rhetorical question. “Why do the Gentile nations *rage* against the king of Israel? Why do they *vainly* think that they could be successful in their designs to break away from His rule?” Thus we read of the folly of those who think that they would be successful in rebelling against Israel. Although the nations plan together and combine forces with one another, their efforts are futile. Their hatred toward their king is evident. They regard his rule over them as *slavery* and *confinement*. They desire to cast his authority off of them.

The psalmist sees their rebellion as doomed to fail. And the reason is that their rebellion is against the Lord in heaven who Himself has chosen this new king to serve in His kingdom. God had singled him out, this son of David. God had “anointed” him, that is, God had equipped him with strength and authority to wield power on His behalf. His kingdom would be established. And therefore all attempts to overthrow his rule would fail.

Next we read of...

B. The response of the Lord (2:4-6)

- 2:4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
 The Lord shall hold them in derision.
 2:5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,
 And distress them in His deep displeasure:
 2:6 “Yet I have set My King
 On My holy hill of Zion.”

Above the sound of the raging rebels, laughter is heard. God laughs at their feeble and futile attempts. Jehovah derides their defiance. God scoffs at their petty efforts to thwart His purposes. He is angry toward them that they would attempt such a thing. His displeasure is manifest toward them and He will bring distress upon them. And God’s laughter gives way to His spoken response. God affirms his king in the face of their opposition, who oppose not only His chosen king, but His purpose to rule over them. He in effect says to them, “*In spite of your resistance and rebellion, I have established this one as king over my kingdom.*”

Here God refers to Jerusalem as “Zion.” “Yet I have set My King on My holy hill, Zion.” Zion was the northern most hill in Jerusalem on which the temple would be built. God was declaring that His king would reign over His people regardless of their objections and efforts to overthrow him.

C. The king asserts his divine appointment (2:7-9)

Now the king speaks. He declares that God had decreed that he would sit upon that throne. God had ordained that he had the right to rule over His people. The king asserts what His God had promised him, “God affirmed me to be His Son.” As we read in verse 7.

- 2:7 “I will declare the decree:
 The Lord has said to Me,
 ‘You are My Son,
 Today I have begotten You,

Now of course as we have been speaking of the historical setting in ancient Israel, we as believers in Jesus Christ, see the Lord Jesus prophesied in these words. Truly *Jesus is the only begotten Son of God*. And

although these verses were applied to descendants of David in ancient Israel, this verse, Psalm 2:7, is quoted by the writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews to show the deity of the Lord Jesus. It is found in Hebrews 1:5. “The Lord has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’”

But we also need to realize that in the strict historical context these words referred to the son of David being crowned king in ancient Israel. Every son of David who ascended the throne of ancient Israel was in a sense regarded as a “son of God,” that is by adoption. This title given to the new king upon his coronation described *the new relationship* that God had established with him. The day that this man was crowned king, God came to regard him as “his son”, who would rule over the people of God on His behalf. (Cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-14 in which David’s son, Solomon is spoken of as a “son of God.”)

Now, often times in the ancient middle east an elderly king would move to have his son crowned so that he would rule on behalf of his father as the father lived out his final years. The son would sit at the right hand of his father and exercise his kingly power in the name of his father. This psalm and this title, “My Son” was affirming is that in reality Jehovah was the King of His people, and that the son of David upon being crowned came into a father/son relationship with the God of Israel. The king of Israel would now rule on behalf of God his “Father”, the true King of Israel. This is what was unique about David. David saw His responsibility as king over Israel to rule on behalf of God, not on behalf of himself. He was a man after God’s own heart.

God promised that He would regard the son of David as His son. God thus put His full authority behind His king, assuring that not only that his kingdom would maintain its previous status, but that his kingdom would expand greatly. Even many more Gentile nations would be brought into the kingdom of God’s son. Here in verse 7 of Psalm 2 the son of David announces that God had promised him His kingdom; God had declared that His kingdom would advance.

We see the willingness of God to expand his kingdom in **verses 8 and 9**:

- 2:8 Ask of Me, and I will give You
The nations for your inheritance,
And the ends of the earth for Your possession
2:9 You shall break them with a rod of iron;
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

The exaltation of this son of David does not portend well for the secessionists. This king shall go forth from Jerusalem to crush and conquer all opposition to his rule. Again, why is this? Because God has decreed that His king would be Lord over these outlying regions. The kingdom would greatly expand under his rule.

D. The Recommendation of the Psalmist (2:10-12)

The psalmist sums up the matter. What are the options for these would-be rebels? There is none but one. In effect God declares,

If you desire to survive, you had better beat a path to Jerusalem and sue for peace. Go and bow down before the enthroned king and affirm his authority, your allegiance to his kingdom, and your submission to his rule. Humble yourself before him. Bow before him and give him your devoted allegiance to his rule. He will forgive you of your foolish notions of rebellion. Moreover, you will then become the object of his favor. He will overshadow you with His authority to protect you and provide for you as you serve Him.

And so the psalmist wrote:

- 2:10 Now therefore, be wise, O Kings,
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.
2:11 Serve the Lord with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.
2:12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,
And you perish in the way,

When His wrath is kindled but a little,
Blessed are all those who put their trust in them.

That is essentially how the psalm had historically been seen and used. But over the course of time this psalm came to be viewed as pointing to a yet to come greater Son of David, that of course being the Lord Jesus Christ.

How did this happen? The history of Israel after David was a record of decline and disintegration of the kingdom. Apart from Solomon, David's son, and a few others, the kings of Israel were a motley sort. I can't help think that there must have been a degree of sarcasm or even cynicism as the kingdom diminished and disintegrated and each subsequent descendant was set before the people to rule. When this psalm was read, I could envision the people thinking, "Oh, if only this would come to pass." Yet certainly no ancient king achieved the stature and success suggested by this psalm. And when a rising star did appear, say, **King Hezekiah** or **King Josiah**, their success was short-lived and there was great disillusionment upon their deaths. We can see how easy it would have been for this psalm to become regarded as *prophetic*, anticipating the coming of the Messiah, the Anointed Son of David. And finally, when the dynasty of David was overthrown in 586 BC, when Babylon defeated Judah and Jerusalem, when the Babylonians conquered and decimated the land, this psalm, Psalm 2, could only be regarded as a prophecy of what would yet come.

And indeed, early Christians saw this psalm as *a prophesy of Jesus Christ!* This psalm is quoted as referring to Jesus Christ in more than a few places in the New Testament. It's found in Acts 4:25, 26, and Acts 13:33, and in Hebrews 1:5. It is alluded to in several of the early apostolic sermons of Acts. Indeed, this psalm of David was inspired of God to provide a prophecy of the death, resurrection, and enthronement in heaven of Jesus Christ the Son of God.