

July (C2C)
(Comments based on ESV text)

July 1 — **Ascents** — Psalms 120-132. The title of each of these short psalms is “Song of Ascents,” which refers to traveling to the temple (or tabernacle) in elevated Jerusalem for worship. *“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD’”*

July 2 — **Give Thanks** — Psalms 133-139. The antiphonal song of Ps. 136 repeats 26 times this expression: *“for his steadfast love endures forever,”* providing the reason or support for each previous statement. The psalm begins with, *“Give thanks to the LORD”* and ends with, *“Give thanks to the God of heaven.”* As those of us in America enter this annual time of celebrating the official birth of our nation, let us remember to give thanks to God for the great ways in which He has helped and sustained us in spite of the sinful actions of many of our people and leaders.

July 3 — **Helpless** — Psalms 140-145. It seems “normal” to me that we should pray for God to do something for us that is rather outside our control, like *“Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me and from the snares of evildoers!”* (141:9). However, this same psalm begins with a prayer for things that seem to be within our control: *“Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips! Do not let my heart incline to do any evil ...”* (141:3-4). We must conclude from this that we need God’s help to do whatever He commands. We are more helpless than we might think!

July 4 — **Hallelujah!** — Psalms 146-150. All five of these last psalms begin and end with *“Praise the LORD!”* That expression is one word in Hebrew: *“Hallelujah.”* It is a word that has been transliterated into many languages around the world. In 1985 Leonard Cohen composed the song “Hallelujah,” which remains extremely popular even in our secular culture. But how many people who hear that song know that the word means “Praise Yahweh”? To some, it has become more like a Hindu mantra, a word that is repeated to somehow aid a person spiritually. We should remind ourselves about its meaning every time we use it. Ps. 148:3-11 declares that all creation praises God by their presence and function, being and doing what they were created to do. Mankind alone is given the opportunity and the choice to praise Him verbally and meaningfully. Praise Yahweh!

July 5 — **Proverbs** — Proverbs 1-3. The book of Proverbs was written primarily by Solomon. The first nine chapters present a father’s challenge to his son for the purpose of appreciating and gaining both knowledge and wisdom. The section begins with, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge”* (1:7), and ends with, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom”* (9:10). Knowledge in Proverbs is a “correct understanding of the world and oneself ... while ‘wisdom’ is ... applying that knowledge rightly” (ESV Study Bible). Understanding and application! The expression, *“the fear of the LORD,”* is also used many times in Proverbs, and it includes not only reverent awe but also a healthy fear of God’s displeasure and discipline (ESV Study Bible).

July 6 — **Choose Your Partner** — Prov. 4-7. These proverbs look negatively at the wayward woman, one who may be attractive but is promiscuous and devious. She also represents many people today who have a form of godliness (*“I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows”*—7:14) but it doesn’t affect their way of life (*“... so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you”*—7:15). In contrast, is the faithful wife who is a refreshing and lasting source of satisfaction (*“your own cistern ... well ... springs ... streams”*—5:15-16). Then, comes something I never noticed before: *“Let your fountain be blessed ...”* (5:18). The fountain is the faithful wife. Satisfy her by drinking from her stream alone!

July 7 — **Applying Wisdom** — Prov. 8-11. Today we enter the second section of Proverbs. This primary section (Prov.10-26) presents proverbs of Solomon. He wrote others, however, since 1 Kings 4:32 says that he *“spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.”* A proverb is often a brief

comparison of something physical that is applied in another sense, e.g., *“Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman without discretion”* (11:22). It sometimes contains a humorous picture, like *“The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth”* (19:24). Proverbs are usually understood to apply generally, therefore they are not laws or promises that apply in every situation. However, they do apply in most situations. Each of these proverbs is a part of God’s Word, so none of them may be dismissed as not being applicable. Be wise in applying them!

July 8 — **Getting Lost** — Prov. 12-15. I thought of the proverbial male who refuses to ask for directions when I read, *“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice”* (12:15). Why do we tend to do that? Pride. Today’s proverbs focus on another evidence of pride: not accepting reproof. Both men and women hate being corrected because it challenges us to admit that we were wrong. There are negative consequences for refusing to acknowledge our mistakes. The one *“who hates reproof is stupid”* (12:1) and *“will die”* (15:10). But there are great benefits for those who are willing to humbly accept reproof, or correction, from someone. They are *“honored”* (13:18), *“prudent”* (15:5), *“will dwell among the wise”* (15:31), and *“gains intelligence”* (15:32). Let’s be willing to admit that we sometimes get lost and make mistakes.

July 9 — **Overruled!** — Prov. 16-19. I noticed four verses in our reading for today emphasizing that God has a plan for each of our lives that may veto some of our own desires and decisions. *“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD”* (16:33). He will also work in our hearts and minds to bring us to the decisions that please Him and are good for us. *“The heart of a man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps”* (16:9). *“Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand”* (19:21). If following His will is our highest desire, He will make sure to get us to where we ought to go. *“Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established”* (16:3).

July 10 — **Vengeance** — Prov. 20-23. It would have been helpful if there were a chapter break at the end of the long section of Solomon’s proverbs at 22:16 because *“the thirty sayings”* (22:20) of *“the words of the wise”* (22:17) begin a new section that extends through chapter 24. Each saying normally begins with a command and follows with a reason or result. Another group of Solomon’s proverbs will follow in chapter 25. I took a vocational aptitude test in high school that proposed what kind of work would best fit me. One of the three suggestions was to be a policeman. Often when I drive, I think of that test because I get a strong urge to want to ticket people who do things like rolling through a right-hand turn on a red signal. I was reminded today, however, that it is not my prerogative to punish wrongdoing. *“Do not say, ‘I will repay evil’; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you”* (20:22). Paul said something very similar: *“Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord”* (Rom. 12:19). It is probably a good thing that I didn’t become a cop!

July 11 — **Bragging** — Prov. 24-27. The last section of Solomon’s proverbs (chapters 25-29) was discovered during King Hezekiah’s great reformation in Israel (2 Kings 18:1-6), about 300 years after they were written. I sometimes catch myself after making a comment that I realize was really intended to make someone think more highly of me. Hopefully, I will grow in catching myself before saying it. Our sinful nature is selfish and longs to bring favorable attention to ourselves. One of Solomon’s proverbs often comes to my mind when I am tempted to brag: *“Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips”* (27:2). Others will notice good things about us and some will comment about it. That is enough.

July 12 — **The ABCs of Womanhood** — Prov. 28-31. We don’t know who King Lemuel was, but his mother taught him a well-constructed poem (31:10-31) describing the ideal wife and mother: *“She is far more precious than jewels”* (31:10). It is an acrostic poem with each verse starting with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Her focus is at her home but she is also involved in wider

aspects of work: “*She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard*” (31:16). We can sing her praises even if it isn’t Mother’s Day!

July 13 — **Ecclesiastes** — Ecclesiastes 1-4. The Latin word “Ecclesiastes” means “*Preacher*” (or “*Teacher*”—NIV). This book was written by Solomon, Israel’s wisest king (“*surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me*”—1:16). It is an unusual book in the OT collection of Wisdom Literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Song of Solomon). One could get depressed reading about its oft-repeated pessimistic view that “*all is vanity*” (1:2) but don’t let this book get you down! One of its main themes is that God rules over all people and things and that we are to fear God despite how confusing and incomplete life sometimes feels in our fallen world. God shows His purpose and ability to control by making “*everything beautiful in its time.*” His gifts to us are putting “*eternity into man’s heart*” and challenging us to “*find out what God has done from the beginning to the end*” (3:11). So, while experiencing the frustrations of life, don’t miss the blessings of God!

July 14 — **Vows** — Eccl. 5-8. When my younger daughter was 4 years old, she asked if I would help her memorize Scripture like her older sister had been doing. Knowing that the numbered references might be difficult for her to remember, I found ten special-combination verses for her to tackle, like Genesis 1:1. When we got to 5:5, I chose this important statement in Ecclesiastes: “*It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.*” Not making empty promises is an important lesson to learn early in life. The context of this statement is about making vows to God (5:4), which gives even more weight to the statement. Have you promised God something in the past that you have not kept? This would be a good time to confess your lapse to Him and to get back to working on the good that you promised to do.

July 15 — **Our Purpose** — Eccl. 9-12. The final verses of this sometimes-confusing book are very clear regarding the purpose and direction of life: “*Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man*” (12:13). This should be the life-verse for all of us. It ends by describing the negative consequences of living any other way: “*For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil*” (12:14). One of those secret things struck me earlier: “*Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich*” (10:20). Nothing is private for us when God is everywhere-present and all-knowing.

July 16 — **Song of Solomon** — Song 1-4. What is this book all about? That question has generated many widely different interpretations. Some have seen it as an allegory depicting love between God and His people (Israel or the Church). Most others see it more literally as a poetic drama emphasizing God’s intentions regarding love between a man and woman leading to monogamous marriage, from which Solomon certainly departed.

July 17 — **Dreams** — Song 5-8. Recently, I had a dream about golf. (All my dreams about golf are nightmares.) I was getting ready to tee off on the first hole but instead of having a ball to hit, it was a small rabbit covered with white feathers instead of fur. Dreams often have ties to reality (like golf) but also contain bizarre disconnects with reality (like rabbits with feathers). One thing that makes the Song of Solomon difficult to understand is that it seems to include a dream sequence (3:1—6:3) introduced with, “*On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not*” (cf. also 5:2). It includes a nightmarish encounter with watchmen who beat her (5:7). That middle section of the book emphasizes the tension of restricted love before marriage but the book concludes with the relaxed and unrestrained joy of being married to the one you love.

July 18 — **Isaiah** — Isaiah 1-2. Today we enter the large section of the OT prophets. The prophet’s job was not only to foretell the future but to proclaim what is right and what is wrong—not a popular task. According to Fee and Stuart’s book, “How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth,” less than 5% of the message of these prophets predict events that will happen in NT times, less than 2% about the

coming Messiah, and less than 1% about things yet in the future for us (e.g., “... *neither shall they learn war anymore*”—2:4). As can be seen by the following “Simplified Overview of Isaiah” from the ESV Study Bible, the first 39 chapters of Isaiah are focused primarily on the spiritually deteriorated condition of Israel and the harassment and eventual take-over of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians, who were sent in judgment against God’s sinful people. As Isaiah cried out against the spiritual drift of the people of God in his day (e.g., 2:6), we need to recognize and guard against our own tendency to drift toward the standards and practices of the secular majority around us. We don’t want our “*many prayers*” to be hindered because our “*hands are full of blood*” (1:15).

Simplified Overview of Isaiah			
	Isaiah 1–39	Isaiah 40–55	Isaiah 56–66
Date and Setting	The eighth century B.C.(700s); the Assyrian threat	Prophecies about the 6th century B.C.(500s); the Babylonian exile	Prophecies about all times and occasions until the end
Audience	God’s rebellious people craving worldly security	God’s defeated people under worldly domination	All who hold fast to God’s covenant
Actions	God purifies a remnant of his apostate people through judgment	God consoles his discouraged people in exile	God prepares all of his true people for his promised salvation
Message	“In returning and rest you shall be saved; ... But you were unwilling” (30:15)	“... the glory of the Lord shall be revealed” (40:5)	“Keep justice, and do righteousness” (56:1)

July 19 — **Bigger Percentage** — Isaiah 3-5. One of our readers pointed out to me that I left out something very important yesterday when I quoted the OT foretelling prophecy percentages from Fee and Stuart’s book. That is that in addition to the approximately 8% of OT prophecy that points to the NT times and later, there is a much larger percentage of prophecy that points to more immediate events that were fulfilled in OT times. As I read through the three chapters assigned for today, I noted that all of chapter 3, except for vv. 9-12, is predictive prophecy; essentially all of chapter 4 is prophecy foretelling the coming Messiah; in chapter 5, vv. 5-6, 8-10, 13-17, and 24-30 speak of specific future results that would follow Israel’s sin. So, if these three chapters were representative of all the OT prophets, almost 73% of the content is foretelling prophecy. Two verses stuck out to me today that describe our current cultural atmosphere: “... *they proclaim their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it*” (3:9) and “*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil*” (5:20). May we be bright lights that shine into this darkness!

July 20 — **Messiah** — Isaiah 6-9. Many things in this passage point to the coming Messiah. The partially-fulfilled prophecy of the birth of Immanuel (“God with us”) with the maiden in Isaiah’s time (7:14) was ultimately fulfilled with the virgin Mary in Jesus’ day. There is even a geographical, Messiah-connected prophecy that, despite the destruction of the northern kingdom, “*in the latter time he has made glorious ... the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations*” (9:1). Then the famous passage beginning with, “*For to us a child is born ...*” (9:6-7), describes this coming King. Other things to look for in this book, submitted by one reader from the Big Ideas in Isaiah (see the Quick View Bible): 1) Earthly alliances disappoint, but trusting God brings salvation. 2) Because God is holy and loving, he must punish the rebellious; but he will eventually redeem those who repent. 3) God is the ultimate King who is just and righteous. 4) God promises to send the Messiah, who will bring justice and salvation to all who believe.

July 21 — **Jesse’s Shoot** — Isaiah 10-12. Twice in this passage David’s father, Jesse, is mentioned, both times referring to the climax of the kingly line of David with the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. He is a “*shoot from the stump of Jesse*” (11:1) and “*the root of Jesse*” (11:10). Paul quotes the latter verse in Rom. 15:12 when talking about Christ becoming “*a servant to the circumcised ... to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs*” (Rom. 15:8). Isaiah concluded today’s reading for those of us

who have drawn “*water from the wells of salvation*” (12:3), that our mandate as Christians is to “*Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted*” (12:4). How can you do that today?

July 22 — **Surrounded** — Isaiah 13-15. Today we read about four oppressing nations that surrounded the land of Judah and Israel in Isaiah’s day. Babylon to the east received the divine curse that the city that would rule an empire, would “*never be inhabited or lived in for all generations*” (13:20), a situation that still exists in its location in present-day Iraq. Assyria, the kingdom to the north, had already invaded Israel but God said, “*I will break the Assyrian in my land*” (14:25). To the west were the Philistines who were a perpetual problem for God’s people but God told them to “*melt in fear*” (14:31) because of the destroying judgment heading their way. Finally, to the southeast of the Promised Land, the people of Moab, the incestuous descendants of Lot, would be “*laid waste in a night*” (15:1). We are also becoming surrounded today by anti-Christian oppressors in our local and national cultures, but they will not prevail. God always wins and He always brings His people through hardships, both personal and national.

July 23 — **Just Love** — Isaiah 16-19. After the prophecy about Moab concluded in chapter 16, Isaiah moved on in chapter 18 to other countries to the far south: Cush (modern southern Egypt, northern Sudan, and part of Ethiopia) and then northern Egypt in chapter 19. Before that, however, there was a prophecy of judgment regarding the alliance between the rebellious northern kingdom of Israel (capital: Samaria) and Syria (capital: Damascus): “*The fortress will disappear from Ephraim and the kingdom from Damascus*” (17:3). Because Israel turned away from God, they were not protected by Him and both they and Syria were crushed by Assyria in 732-721 B.C. “*For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the Rock of your refuge*” (17:10). God did leave a remnant of His people there, however (“ *gleanings will be left in it*”—17:6), where the Jew would “*look to his Maker, and his eyes will look on the Holy One of Israel*” (17:7). The God of justice always punishes evil but He is also the God of love who always promotes good.

July 24 — **Fallen Babylon** — Isaiah 20-23. Much of the OT shows Babylon as a powerful human force that dominated a huge expanse of people groups. They were even used by God to defeat and deport most of the rebellious people Judah to their eastern land. But in Isa. 21:9, its dramatic end is predicted: “*Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods.*” A similar prediction is given in Jeremiah 51:8, 44, 49. At the end of the NT, Babylon still stands symbolically as the grand representation of the sinful world of mankind. The same phrase Isaiah used is repeated in Rev. 14:8: “*Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.*” Sin won’t win and its wages are death.

July 25 — **Perfect Peace** — Isaiah 24-26. In the past three days, we have read about God’s judgment of individual nations (ch. 13-23), but today we read most of a section (ch. 24-27) devoted to the whole world near the end of time on earth. The reason for judgment is that “*they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, [and] broken the everlasting covenant*” (24:5). But in the midst of this judgment comes a song from those who have been redeemed: “*From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One*” (24:16). And later, “*This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation*” (25:9). You can also rejoice today because, “*You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you*” (26:3). We are blessed in that many of the anticipated joys of heaven can be experienced by Christians on earth today.

July 26 — **Real Worship** — Isaiah 27-29. God predicted that in the end times, not only His people of Judah, but also the “lost tribes” of northern Israel will be restored (27:6). “*Those who were lost in the land of Assyria and ... Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem*” (27:13). There is also a **spiritual** kind of “lostness” described where “*people draw near with their*

mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me” (29:13). Mere mechanical worship is something we need to guard against today. Instead, in genuine worship, we should “sanctify the Holy One ... stand in awe of the God of Israel ... come to understanding, and ... accept instruction” (29:23-24).

July 27 — **Guidance** — Isaiah 30-32. I saw much in our reading today about looking for and following God’s direction. The people of Judah were called “*stubborn children*” for not doing that, being determined to “*carry out a plan, but not mine .. without asking my direction*” (30:1-2). They were not only stubborn but they were also “*a rebellious people*” who were “*unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD*” (30:9). Later, they are seen as people “*who trust in chariots ... but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD!*” (31:1). In contrast, we should be those who hear the loving voice of God saying, “*This is the way, walk in it*” (31:21), whenever we get off course. Be conscious today about making decisions. Ask God to guide you in going the way He knows is best for you.

July 28 — **Some Day** — Isaiah 33-36. Most of our reading for today is couched in the invading threat of Assyria, but they will be turned away by the mighty hand of God (tomorrow’s reading). Isaiah also gave us a breath of far-future hope in chapter 35 as he saw ahead to a time following Christ’s Second Coming when there will be no blindness, deafness, or lameness (35:5-6). For “*the ransomed of the LORD ... everlasting joy shall be upon their heads ... and sorrow and sighing shall flee away*” (35:10). We experience joy today but, on that day, it will be ALL joy with no sadness of disappointment, conflict, sickness, or death.

What a day that will be,
When my Jesus I shall see,
And I look upon His face,
The One who saved me by His grace;
When He takes me by the hand,
And leads me through the Promised Land,
What a day, glorious day that will be.

--Jim Hill

July 29 — **Hezekiah** — Isaiah 37-39. Hezekiah was one of the good kings of Judah. He showed humility in the face of the Assyrian threat when he tore his clothes and wore sackcloth (37:1). He showed his dependence on God as he spread out the enemy’s blasphemous letter before the LORD in the temple (37:14) and prayed, desiring that other nations would come to know that Yahweh alone is God (37:20). God answered his prayer by delivering Jerusalem from the surrounding Assyrian army by miraculously wiping them out while Jerusalem slept (37:21). Hezekiah was not all good, however. He showed himself to be selfish in several ways, the last being when Isaiah predicted the later Babylonian exile and Hezekiah declared the prophecy to be “*good ... For he thought, ‘There will be peace and security in my days’*” (39:8). We are not all good either, and should guard against selfishness and other sins that often lie below the surface in our lives.

July 30 — **Future Hope** — Isaiah 40-41. You will notice a decided shift in tone as we begin a new section in Isaiah today (ch. 40-55). The ESV Study Bible notes that these chapters look ahead nearly 200 years to the time when Israel would be in captivity in Babylon. It anticipates the destruction of the Babylonian kingdom by the Medo-Persian Empire described as coming from the east (41:2) and the north (41:25). We see in these chapters many positive notes, like the one claimed by John the Baptist as a voice crying in the wilderness: “*prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God*” (40:3); another one reminds us that “*the word of our God will stand forever*” (40:8); another says that “*those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength*” (40:31); a final one declares, “*fear not, for I am with you ... for I am your God*” (41:10).

July 31 — **Not Forgotten** — Isaiah 42-44. Reflecting on the Exodus deliverance by God “*who makes a way in the sea*” (43:16), He looks forward to “*doing a new thing ... I will make a way in the wilderness*” (43:19), as Israel’s release from the Babylonian captivity is not only predicted but the name of the Persian king (Cyrus) who will order it is given (44:28). The first-century Jewish historian Josephus wrote that Cyrus read this ancient prophecy of Isaiah and was so impressed that he considered it a divine order to accomplish what had been predicted. Despite Israel’s predicted 70-year exile in Babylon (Jer. 29:10), God would remember to deliver them. Even today, after having lived 2,000 years in rejection of the Messiah, God’s promise to the Jewish people still stands: “*O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me*” (44:21).