

## The Book of Psalms: An Overview

The Book of Psalms in the Hebrew Bible is actually a collection of five different “books” containing a total of 150 Psalms of several different literary genres. The table on page 3 below gives an overview of several features of each of the Psalms, along with some summary statistics:

- **Books I-V:** The common division into five separate “books” of Psalms is based on the concluding doxologies and/or “Amens” found in 41:14; 72:18-20; 89:53; 106:48; and the entirety of Ps 150.
  - Note: **Book IV** is found **below Book III** in the main chart, since both of these are much shorter than the other three “books.”
- **Ps#** - The Psalms are numbered from 1 to 150 in the Hebrew Bible; however, Psalms 9 & 10 really form one longer Psalm, just as 42 & 43 belong together.
  - An asterisk (\*) before the Psalm number marks the eight “Acrostic” Psalms (9/10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145), those in which the first letter of each verse (or group of verses) follows the alphabetical order of the Hebrew alphabet (which is also the main reason we know Ps 9 & 10 belong together).
- **#Vv.** - The second column lists the number of verses in each Psalm, according to the versification of the *New American Bible* translation.
  - For many of the Psalms, the number of verses is slightly different (often one or two less) in the King James Version, Revised Standard Version, and other modern English translations, due to differences between the ancient Hebrew, the Greek Septuagint, and/or the Latin Vulgate versions of the Bible.
- **Type** - In the Hebrew text itself, many of the Psalms have a superscription that identifies what type of composition it is: Psalm, Prayer, Song, Praise Hymn, etc.
  - Biblical scholars are uncertain and debate what the “Maskil” and “Miktam” and “Shiggaion” are; there is greater agreement and clarity about those labeled “Song of Ascents” and “Halleluia” (Praise God).
- **Attrib.** - Many psalms are explicitly attributed to a particular biblical figure, very often (King) David, but sometimes also the Korahites, Asaph, or other individuals.
  - An ampersand (&) in this column indicates those psalms in which the superscription gives further information about the text’s historical context (e.g. Ps 102: “The prayer of one afflicted and wasting away whose anguish is poured out before the Lord”), and/or instructions (often explicitly addressed “To the Leader”) about what type of musical instruments or tune to use (e.g., Ps 4: “With stringed instruments”; or Ps 46: “According to alamothe [a tune]”).
- **Category** - Modern Scholars classify the Psalms into several different literary categories, including **Hymns, Laments, Songs of Thanksgiving, etc.**, some of which are individual (*I/me/my*), while others are communal (*we/us/our*).
  - See the table below for a complete listing of the different types, attributions, and categories of psalms, and the number of occurrences of each.

### Discrepancies in the Numbering of the Psalms:

Unfortunately, great confusion in the numbering of the Psalms is caused by *discrepancies* between the **Hebrew Bible** (HB) and the **Greek Septuagint** (LXX) and **Latin Vulgate** (Vg) translations of the Old Testament. Most modern English translations of the Bible use the numbers of the HB, while others use the numbers from the LXX and Vg. Any biblical references found in Vatican documents use the Vulgate numbers. Thus, Ps 21:29 (Vulgate numbering) is the same as Ps 22:29 (Hebrew numbering).

Hebrew Bible Psalm Numbers	Greek and Latin Bibles (Septuagint and Vulgate)
1 to 8	1 to 8 ( <i>same</i> )
9 & 10	9 ( <i>combined</i> )
11 to 113	10 to 112 ( <i>each one less</i> )
114 & 115	113 ( <i>combined</i> )
116	114 & 115 ( <i>split</i> )
117 to 146	116 to 145 ( <i>each one less</i> )
147	146 & 147 ( <i>split</i> )
148 to 150	148 to 150 ( <i>same</i> )

### Collections within the Book of Psalms:

- An old collection of Psalms attributed to David (Ps 3–41)
- An second collection of the Psalms of David (Ps 51–72)
- A collection of Psalms attributed to the Korah musical guild (Ps 42–49; also 84–85 & 87–88)
- A collection of Psalms attributed to the Asaph musical guild (Ps 50 & 73–83)
- A collection Psalms of YHWH’s kingship (Ps 93–99)
- A collection of Psalms of Pilgrimage; a.k.a. Psalms of “Ascent” to Jerusalem (Ps 120–134)
- Psalms 1–2 function as an Introduction to the whole book
- Psalms 146–150 function as a Conclusion to the whole book.

## Conclusions of the Five “Books” within the Book of Psalms:

- Ps 41:14 – Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from all eternity and forever. Amen. Amen.
- Ps 72:18-20 – Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does wonderful deeds.  
<sup>19</sup> Blessed be his glorious name forever; may he fill all the earth with his glory. Amen and amen.  
<sup>20</sup> The end of the psalms of David, son of Jesse.
- Ps 89:53 – Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and amen!
- Ps 106:48 – Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting!  
 Let all the people say, Amen! Hallelujah!
- Ps 150:1-6 –Hallelujah! Praise God in his holy sanctuary; give praise in the mighty dome of heaven.  
<sup>2</sup> Give praise for his mighty deeds, praise him for his great majesty.  
<sup>3</sup> Give praise with blasts upon the horn, praise him with harp and lyre.  
<sup>4</sup> Give praise with tambourines and dance, praise him with strings and pipes.  
<sup>5</sup> Give praise with crashing cymbals, praise him with sounding cymbals.  
<sup>6</sup> Let everything that has breath give praise to the LORD! Hallelujah!

## Miscellaneous Tidbits:

- **Shortest:** Psalm 117 (only 2 verses!)
- **Longest:** Psalm 119 (has 22 sections of 8 verses each; totaling 176 verses!)
- **Most Similar:** Psalms 14 and 53 are almost identical; Psalms 40:13-17 and 70:2-6 are also almost identical.
- **More Duplications:** Psalms 108:2-6 is identical to 57:8-12; while Psalm 108:7-14 is identical to 60:7-14.
- **Extra:** Psalm 151 (found in the OT Apocrypha)

## Abbreviations and Summary:

Here is a *complete listing* of the types and attributions mentioned in the superscripts of the Hebrew Bible, as well as the categories used by some modern scholars, along with the *total number of each* that occurs among the 150 Psalms. Please note the following:

- There is some duplication, since some superscriptions mention both “psalm” and “song”; some songs are explicitly called “love song” or “sabbath song”; etc.
- The exact meaning of *maskil*, *miktam*, and *shiggaion* is unknown and/or debated among scholars.
- Some superscriptions mention the type but omit an attribution (e.g., Ps 92: “A Psalm. A sabbath song”), and vice-versa (e.g., Pss 25-28 simply say “Of David” without any identification as a “Psalm” or “Prayer,” etc.).

Type (Headings in Hebrew Bible)		Total	Attribution (in HB)		Total	Category (suggested by Modern Scholars)		Total
Ps	Psalm / Mizmor	57	Dav	David	73	Hymn	Hymn / Song of Praise	19
Ps-Thnx	Psalm of Thanksgiving	1	Asa	Asaph	12	YHWH	Hymn of the Lord’s Kingship	6
Sg	Song / Shir	30	Kor	Korahites	11	Lam-Indiv	Individual Lament	43
Sg-Asc	Song of Ascent	15	Sol	Solomon	2	Lam-Cmty	Community Lament	18
Sg-Lv	Love Song	2	Ethan	Ethan	1	Royal	Royal or Messianic Psalm	10
Sg-Sab	Sabbath Song	1	Moses	Moses	1	Thnx-Indiv	Individual Psalm of Gratitude	8
Mas	<i>Maskil</i> / (meaning?)	13	.	.	.	Thnx-Cmty	Communal Psalm of Gratitude	8
Mik	<i>Miktam</i> / (meaning?)	6	.	.	.	Trust-Indiv	Individual Psalm of Confidence	7
Hal	Praise God / Halleluia	11	.	.	.	Trust-Cmty	Communal Psalm of Confidence	3
Prayer	Prayer / Tephillah	5	.	.	.	Wisdom	Wisdom Poem	8
Praise	Praise / Tehillah	1	.	.	.	Zion	Song of Zion (God’s Mountain)	6
Shig	<i>Shiggaion</i> / complaint?	1	&	[extra info]	41	Misc.	Miscellaneous, hard to classify	12

## Use of Psalms in Catholic Liturgy (see <http://catholic-resources.org/Lectionary/>):

- Psalms included in the *Lectionary for Mass*: Sundays
- Psalms included in the *Lectionary for Mass*: Weekdays
- Psalms used in the *Liturgy of the Hours*: Four-Week Psalter
- Psalms used in the *Liturgy of the Hours*: Index
- Psalms omitted from the *Liturgy of the Hours*

## BIBLIOGRAPHY (top 3 here; for more recommendations, see <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Psalms.htm>):

- Davidson, Robert. *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1998.
- Mays, James Luther. *Psalms*. Interpretation: A Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, KY: Westminster/Knox, 1994.
- Schaefer, Konrad. *Psalms*. Berit Olam series. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001.

## Book of Psalms

Bk I (Pss 1-41)						Bk II (Pss 42-72)						Bk III (Pss 73-89)						Bk IV (Pss 90-106)						Bk V (Pss 107-150)						
Ps #	#Vv.	Type	Attrib.	Etc.	Category	#	#Vv.	Type	Attrib.	Etc.	Category	#	#Vv.	Type	Attrib.	Etc.	Category	#	#Vv.	Type	Attrib.	Etc.	Category	#	#Vv.	Type	Attrib.	Etc.	Category	
1	6	.	.	.	WisPoem	42/43	12+5	Maskil	Kor	&	Lam-Indiv	73	28	Ps	Asa	.	WisPoem	107	43	.	.	.	Thanks							
2	12	.	.	.	Royal	44	27	Maskil	Kor	.	Lam-Cmty	74	23	Maskil	Asa	.	Lam-Cmty	108	14	Ps+Sg	D	.	Misc							
3	9	Ps	D	&	Lam-Indiv	45	18	Mas+Sg	Kor	&	Royal	75	11	Ps+Sg	Asa	&	Thanks	109	31	Ps	D	.	Lam-Indiv							
4	9	Ps	D	&	Lam-Indiv	46	12	Song	Kor	&	Zion	76	13	Ps+Sg	Asa	&	Zion	110	7	Ps	D	.	Royal							
5	13	Ps	D	&	Lam-Indiv	47	10	Ps	Kor	.	YHWH	77	21	Ps	Asa	&	Lam-Indiv	111*	10	Hal	.	.	Hymn							
6	11	Ps	D	&	Lam-Indiv	48	15	Ps+Sg	Kor	.	Zion	78	72	Maskil	Asa	.	Misc	112*	10	Hal	.	.	WisPoem							
7	18	Shig	D	&	Lam-Indiv	49	21	Ps	Kor	.	WisPoem	79	13	Ps	Asa	.	Lam-Cmty	113	9	Hal	.	.	Hymn							
8	10	Ps	D	&	Hymn	50	23	Ps	Asa	.	Misc	80	20	Ps	Asa	&	Lam-Cmty	114	8	.	.	.	Hymn							
9/10*	21+18	Ps	D	&	Thanks	51	21	Ps	D	&	Lam-Indiv	81	17	.	Asa	&	Misc	115	18	.	.	.	Trust							
11	7	.	D	.	Trust	52	11	Maskil	D	&	Lam-Indiv	82	8	Ps	Asa	.	Misc	116	19	.	.	.	Thanks							
12	9	Ps	D	&	Lam-Cmty	53	7	Maskil	D	&	Lam-Cmty	83	19	Ps+Sg	Asa	.	Lam-Cmty	117	2	Hal	.	.	Hymn							
13	6	Ps	D	.	Lam-Indiv	54	9	Maskil	D	&	Lam-Indiv	84	13	Ps	Kor	&	Zion	118	29	.	.	.	Thanks							
14	7	.	D	.	Lam-Cmty	55	24	Maskil	D	&	Lam-Indiv	85	14	Ps	Kor	.	Lam-Cmty	119*	176	.	.	.	WisPoem							
15	5	Ps	D	.	Process	56	14	Miktam	D	&	Lam-Indiv	86	17	Prayer	D	.	Lam-Indiv	120	7	Asc	.	.	Lam-Indiv							
16	11	Miktam	D	.	Trust	57	12	Miktam	D	&	Lam-Indiv	87	7	Ps+Sg	Kor	.	Zion	121	8	Asc	.	.	Trust							
17	15	Prayer	D	.	Lam-Indiv	58	12	Miktam	D	&	Lam-Cmty	88	19	Ps+Sg+Ms	Kor	&	Lam-Indiv	122	9	Asc	D	.	Zion							
18	51	.	D	&	Royal	59	18	Miktam	D	&	Lam-Indiv	89	53	Maskil	Ethan	.	Lam-Cmty	123	4	Asc	.	.	Lam-Cmty							
19	15	Ps	D	.	Hymn	60	14	Miktam	D	&	Lam-Cmty							124	8	Asc	D	.	Thanks							
20	10	Ps	D	.	Royal	61	9	.	D	&	Lam-Indiv							125	5	Asc	.	.	Trust							
21	14	Ps	D	.	Royal	62	13	Ps	D	&	Trust	Bk IV					(Pss 90-106)	126	6	Asc	.	.	Lam-Cmty							
22	32	Ps	D	&	Lam-Indiv	63	12	Ps	D	&	Lam-Indiv	#	#Vv.	Type	Attrib.	Etc.	Category	127	5	Asc	Sol	.	WisPoem							
23	6	Ps	D	.	Trust	64	11	Ps	D	.	Lam-Indiv	90	17	Prayer	Moses	.	Lam-Cmty	128	6	Asc	.	.	WisPoem							
24	10	Ps	D	.	Process	65	14	Ps+Sg	D	.	Thanks	91	16	.	.	.	Trust	129	8	Asc	.	.	Trust							
25*	22	.	D	.	Lam-Indiv	66	20	Ps+Sg	.	.	Thanks	92	16	Ps+Sg-Sab	.	.	Thanks	130	8	Asc	.	.	Lam-Indiv							
26	11	.	D	.	Lam-Indiv	67	8	Ps+Sg	.	&	Thanks	93	5	.	.	.	YHWH	131	3	Asc	D	.	Trust							
27	14	.	D	.	Lam-Indiv	68	36	Ps+Sg	D	.	Thanks	94	23	.	.	.	Lam-Cmty	132	18	Asc	.	.	Royal							
28	9	.	D	.	Lam-Indiv	69	37	.	D	&	Lam-Indiv	95	11	.	.	.	Process	133	3	Asc	D	.	Misc							
29	11	Ps	D	.	Hymn	70	6	.	D	&	Lam-Indiv	96	13	.	.	.	YHWH	134	3	Asc	.	.	Misc							
30	13	Ps+Sg	D	.	Thanks	71	24	.	.	.	Lam-Indiv	97	12	.	.	.	YHWH	135	21	Hal	.	.	Hymn							
31	25	Ps	D	.	Lam-Indiv	72	20	.	Sol	.	Royal	98	9	Ps	.	.	YHWH	136	26	.	.	.	Hymn							
32	11	Maskil	D	.	Thanks							99	9	.	.	.	YHWH	137	9	.	.	.	Lam-Cmty							
33	22	.	.	.	Hymn							100	5	Ps-Thx	.	.	Hymn	138	8	.	D	.	Thanks							
34*	23	.	D	&	Thanks							101	8	Ps	D	.	Royal	139	24	Ps	D	.	Misc							
35	28	.	D	.	Lam-Indiv							102	29	Prayer	.	&	Lam-Indiv	140	14	Ps	D	.	Lam-Indiv							
36	13	.	D	&	Lam-Indiv							103	22	.	D	.	Hymn	141	10	Ps	D	.	Lam-Indiv							
37*	40	.	D	.	WisPoem							104	35	.	.	.	Hymn	142	8	Msk+Pry	D	&	Lam-Indiv							
38	23	Ps	D	&	Lam-Indiv							105	45	.	.	.	Misc	143	12	Ps	D	.	Lam-Indiv							
39	14	Ps	D	&	Lam-Indiv							106	48	Hal	.	.	Lam-Cmty	144	15	.	D	.	Royal							
40	18	Ps	D	.	Lam-Indiv													145*	21	Praise	D	.	Hymn							
41	14	Ps	D	.	Thanks													146	10	Hal	.	.	Hymn							
																			147	20	Hal	.	.	Hymn						
																			148	14	Hal	.	.	Hymn						
																			149	9	Hal	.	.	Hymn						
																			150	6	Hal	.	.	Hymn						

\* Acrostics (22 sections begin with 22 letters of Hebrew alphabet)