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 the back side 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.
 - o Note that Book IV is found below Book III in the chart on the other side, 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.
 - O 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.
 - o 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.
 - o 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.
 - O 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 alamoth [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).
 - o See the table below for a complete listing of the different types, attributions, and categories of psalms, and the number of occurrences of each.

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 (He	Total	Attribution (in HB)		Total	Category (s	Category (suggested by Modern Scholars)				
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	Maskil / (meaning?)	13				Thnx-Cmty	Communal Psalm of Gratitude	8		
Mik	Miktam / (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	Shiggaion / complaint?	1	&	[extra info]	41	Misc.	Miscellaneous, hard to classify	12		

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.

Miscellaneous Tidbits:

- Shortest: Psalm 117 (only 2 verses!)
- Longest: Psalm 119 (has 22 sections of 8 verses each; totalling 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)

Book of Psalms

Bk I					(Pss 1-41)	Bk II					(Pss 42-72)	Bk III					(Pss 73-89)	Bk V	Pss				(Pss 107-150)
Ps#	#Vv.	Type	Attrib.	Etc.	Category	#	#Vv.	Type	Attrib.	Etc.	Category		#Vv.	Туре	Attrib.	Etc.	Category	#	#Vv.	Туре	Attrib.		Category
1	6				WisPoem	42/43	12+5	Maskil	Kor		Lam-Indiv	73		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		D		Lam-Indiv
4	9	Ps	D	&	Lam-Indiv	46		Song	Kor	&	Zion	76	13		Asa	&	Zion	110	7	Ps	D		Royal
5	13	Ps	D	&	Lam-Indiv	47	10	Ps	Kor		YHWH	77		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	1						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		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		D		Misc
29	11	Ps	D		Hymn	70	6		D	&	Lam-Indiv	96	13				YHWH	134	3				Misc
30	13	Ps+Sg	D		Thanks	71	24				Lam-Indiv	97	12				YHWH	135	21				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					Hymn	138	8		D		Thanks
34*	23		D	&	Thanks							101	8		D		Royal	139	24		D		Misc
35	28		D		Lam-Indiv	1						102	29	Prayer		&	Lam-Indiv	140	14		D		Lam-Indiv
36	13		D	&	Lam-Indiv	1						103	22		D		Hymn	141	10		D		Lam-Indiv
37*	40		D		WisPoem							104	35				Hymn	142	8	,	D	&	Lam-Indiv
38	23	Ps	D	&	Lam-Indiv							105	45				Misc	143	12		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		D		Hymn
41	14	Ps	D		Thanks													146	10				Hymn
						_												147	20				Hymn
																		148	14	Hal			Hymn
																		149	9				Hymn
* Acro	ostics (22 sectio	ns begir	n with	22 letters of	Hebrew	alphab	et)										150	6	Hal			Hymn

An Overview of Non-Canonical Jewish and Early Christian Literature

NON-BIBLICAL ANCIENT JEWISH LITERATURE:

Old Testament Apocrypha

Seven complete books and various additions to existing books are *not* considered biblical or "canonical" by Jews or Protestants (who call them "Old Testament Apocrypha"); but these *are* considered part of the Old Testament canon by Catholic and Orthodox Christians (who call them "Deuterocanonical Books"):

- Judith
- Tobit
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees
- Wisdom of Solomon
- Ecclesiasticus (a.k.a. Sirach)
- Baruch

- Additions to Daniel:
 - o Prayer of Azariah & Song of Three Jews (Dan 3:24-90)
 - o Susanna (Dan 13)
 - o Bel & the Dragon (Dan 14)
- Additions to Esther
- Letter of Jeremiah (Baruch 6)

Some Orthodox Churches include in their Bibles a few other writings that are not accepted as canonical by Catholics:

• 1 Esdras

- 3 Maccabees
- Prayer of Manasseh

- 2 Esdras (a.k.a. 4 Ezra)
- 4 Maccabees
- Psalm 151

Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

Several ancient Jewish writings are attributed to various biblical figures, although they were almost certainly not written by the purported authors, but rather by anonymous writers several centuries later:

- 1 *Enoch* (Ethiopic Apocalypse of Enoch)
- 2 Enoch (Slavonic Book of the Secrets of Enoch)
- 4 *Baruch* (a.k.a. Paraleipomena Jeremiou)
- Apocalypse of *Abraham*
- Apocalypse of *Adam*
- Apocalypse of *Moses*
- Book of Jubilees
- Books of *Adam and Eve* (Latin version)
- Life of *Adam and Eve* (Greek & Slavonic versions)
- Letter of Aristeas
- Martyrdom of *Isaiah*

- Joseph and Aseneth
- Psalms of Solomon
- Pseudo-Phocilides
- Revelation of *Esdras*
- Second Treatise of the Great Seth
- Sibylline Oracles
- Story of Ahikar
- Testament of Abraham
- Testament of Solomon
- Testaments of the *Twelve Patriarchs*

Other Ancient Jewish Literature:

- Dead Sea Scrolls biblical and sectarian texts, especially but not only from Qumran (ca. 200 BC 68 AD)
- Philo of Alexandria Jewish philosopher and exegete (ca. 20 BC ca. 50 AD); hundreds of important works
- Flavius Josephus Jewish general and historian (ca. 37 ca. 100 AD): Jewish War; Antiquities of the Jews; etc.
- Rabbinic Literature Mishnah, Tosefta, Midrashim, Targumim, Talmudim, etc. (ca. 200 1000 AD)

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Rulers in the Hellenistic and Maccabean Eras

Note: The hyperlinked names are mentioned in the Bible; see the explicit references below the chart. Dates (all BCE) refer to years of reign, not lifespans. Some dates are uncertain or approximate; overlapping dates are due to co-regencies.

Hellenistic	Jewish High Priests (in Jerusalem):					
Alexander the Great (336-323 BCE) Wars of the Diadochi (323-305)		Jaddua (ca. 350-320 BCE) Onias I (ca. 320-290)				
Ptolemaic Rulers (in Egypt): Ptolemy I "Soter" (305-282; a.k.a. Ptolemy Lagi) Ptolemy II "Philadelphus" (282-246) Ptolemy III "Euergetes" (246-221) Ptolemy IV "Philopator" (221-204) Ptolemy V "Epiphanes" (204-180) Cleopatra I (180-176) Ptolemy VI "Philometor" (180-145) Cleopatra II (175-116)	Seleucus I "Nicator" (312-281) Antiochus I "Soter" (281-261) Antiochus II "Theos" (261-246) Seleucus II "Callinicus" (246-225) Seleucus III "Soter Ceraunos" (225-223) Antiochus III "the Great" (223-187) Seleucus IV "Philopator" (187-175) Antiochus IV "Epiphanes" (175-164) Antiochus V "Eupator" (164-162)	Simon I (ca. 290-275) ?Eleazar (ca. 275-260?) ?Manasseh (ca. 260-245?) Onias II (ca. 245-220) Simon II "The Righteous" (ca. 220-198) Onias III (ca. 198-174) Jason (174-171) Menelaus (171-161) Alcimus (161-159)				
Ptolemy VII "Neos Philopator" (145) Ptolemy VIII "Euergetes II Physcon" (145-116) Cleopatra III (116-101) Ptolemy IX "Soter II Lathyrus" (116-107, 88-80) Ptolemy X "Alexander I" (107-88) Cleopatra Berenice (101-88) Ptolemy XI "Alexander II" (80) Ptolemy XII "Auletes" (80-59, 55-51) Cleopatra VII (51-30) Ptolemy XIII (51-47) Ptolemy XIV (47-44)	Demetrius I "Soter" (162-150) Alexander "Epiphanes" (Balas; 150-145) Demetrius II "Nicator" (145-141, 129-125) Antiochus VI "Epiphanes Dionysius" (145-142) Trypho (142-138) Antiochus VII "Sidetes" (138-129) [descendants of Demetrius II and Antiochus VII fight for control, with many different rulers and some rival claimants until the Romans come in 65 BCE]	[No high priest in Jerusalem, 159-152] Jonathan Maccabeus (152-142) Simon Maccabeus (142-135) John Hyrcanus (135-104) Aristobulus (104-103) Alexander Jannaeus (103-76) [Alexandra Salome ruled 76-67; with son Hyrcanus II as high priest] Aristobulus II (67-63) Hyrcanus II (63-40) Antigonus (40-37)				