

W. Dennis Tucker Jr., *Constructing and Deconstructing Power in Psalms 107–150*, Ancient Israel and Its Literature 19; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014. Pp. xii + 259. ISBN 978-1589839724. Hardback \$43.95, Paperback \$28.95.

- [1] *Constructing and Deconstructing Power in Psalms 107–150* by W. Dennis Tucker Jr. is the nineteenth volume of SBL Press’s Ancient Israel and Its Literature series. Tucker is an Associate Professor of Christian Scriptures and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University, Waco, Texas. This is his second published work addressing the Hebrew Psalter—the first being the volume coauthored with Joel S. Burnett and W. H. Bellinger, *Diachronic and Synchronic: Reading the Psalms in Real Time*. The present volume, *Constructing and Deconstructing Power in Psalms 107–150*, is a scholarly treatment of the concepts of political and divine power in book 5 of the Psalter. In this monograph, Tucker addresses the issue of which foreign human political powers the psalmists present as the oppressors of Israel—the deconstruction of power. Secondly, he presents the overarching theme in book 5 of YHWH as the ultimate authority above, in, and throughout the cosmos—the reconstruction of power.
- [2] Tucker’s monograph can be divided into three sections. Chapters 1 and 2 discuss his methodological approach to constructing and deconstructing the theme of power in book 5. He acknowledges that his work is fundamentally dependent on Gerald H. Wilson’s *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*. Tucker acknowledges Martin Leuenberger, Egert Ballhorn, and Harris Birkeland as other influential scholars in the development of his own methodology and argument. After he establishes his method, Tucker presents evidence that points to the Persian Empire as the oppressive foreign imperial power depicted throughout book 5. This appears to be the section of his monograph where he “deconstructs power.” In order to provide a convincing foundation, he draws on several extrabiblical ancient Near Eastern texts that identify the Persian Empire as the foreign power, such as Naqsh-I Rostam, the Behistun Inscription, and the Cyrus Cylinder.
- [3] Chapters 3 and 4 are where he presents his most important material. Here, Tucker applies his methodology to Pss 107–110, 137, the Hallel psalms, the Psalms of Ascent, and the Davidic psalms of book 5, although some of these references overlap. Chapters 3 and 4 focus primarily on the topic of foreign human political power. Tucker effectively argues that when Pss 107–150 refer to or depict an imperial power, the psalmist never has anything good to say—it is always negative. In the mind of the psalmists, imperial powers—the Persian Empire—are the oppressors of Israel, the destroyers of God’s chosen people, and the ones who are ignorant or dismissive of YHWH’s absolute divine authority. Summarized, Tucker argues that human imperialism deconstructed is the destruction and operation of God’s chosen people.
- [4] In the remainder of the book, chapters 5 to 7, Tucker addresses the second part of his thesis, in which he contends that the primary theme of book 5 is that YHWH is the ultimate authority above, in, and throughout the cosmos. Tucker argues that this idea is the overarching theme of book 5 of the Psalter. In these final three chapters, Tucker constructs the notion of power through extensive analysis of the psalmist’s reference to YHWH in light of the oppressing imperial powers. Fundamentally, he argues that human power is deconstructed through the presence of oppression, which leads to the unavoidable truth of humanity’s weakness and helplessness. Following this conclusion, Tucker convincingly

presents evidence that certain psalms construct YHWH as humanity's hope when faced with oppression, and that book 5 of the Psalter clearly contains the theme of YHWH as the source of hope for his servants, the children of Israel. It is unfortunate that Tucker does not go outside of the context of the text in order to create a parallel to the modern church. Therefore, his discussion is limited solely to those addressed in book 5.

- [5] Tucker's monograph seems to bypass a single important area that I would have expected him to address. He primarily approaches book 5 only in its final redaction form, and uses this to argue that the primary imperial power is the Persian Empire. This is acceptable only if the reader adopts Tucker's presuppositions of dating and theological refinement. For instance, would his argument be pertinent if he addressed the individual historical backgrounds and contexts of the separate psalms in book 5? Clearly, Ps 107 supports his position, but the possible original context of other psalms seem to reference the Babylonian or Assyrian kingdoms. Furthermore, what about the dating of the different collections within book 5. This does not seem to be an important question for Tucker, but the issue has serious ramifications when you consider the multiple collections that exist within book 5. It would be interesting and possibly helpful for his argument if this topic was addressed.
- [6] Nonetheless, I recommend Tucker's *Constructing and Deconstructing Power in Psalms 107–150* to any person who is interested in following the academic lineage of Wilson in the intentional editorial structuring of the psalms. More importantly, I think that this work is helpful in understanding the psalms' focus on YHWH's cosmic deity, a complex topic that deserves a focused investigation such as this one.

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