

them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear יהוה, the God of heaven, Who made the sea and the dry land.” (Jonah 1:8–9)

When Jonah describes the God he serves (the word “fear” has the sense of “serve” or “worship”), he first gives His name, יהוה, and then describes Him as the supreme God (“God of heaven”) and finally His work by which He is proven to be supreme, i.e., that He made the sea and dry land. Indeed, from the first pages of the Tanach and through its entirety, God is portrayed as the God Who acts, and it is in His actions—His work—within the sphere of human existence, and in the course of human history, by which He is known and reveals Himself to those who have been given eyes to see, ears to hear, and a mind (heart) to accept the works of God. Thus, creation, the call of Abraham, the exodus, the establishment of the nation of Israel, the sending of the prophets, the exile of Israel, the sending of Yeshua, Yeshua’s death, burial, resurrection, ascension, the outpouring of the Ruach, the Apostolic mission, the writing of Scripture, etc., are all acts of God by which He is known. And in all of these, He is known as the God who enters history for the purpose of establishing relationship with mankind—with those He has created in His image. Of course, the event of Yeshua’s incarnation for the purpose of procuring eternal salvation for all who are His is the crowning work by which God has made Himself known.

#### *The Name יהוה*

While an investigation into all of the names by which God has revealed Himself in the Scriptures is beyond the scope of our current study, a brief study of the meaning of the Name most often used of God in the Tanach, יהוה, will demonstrate the manner in which God’s Name functions in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe God as He truly is.

The Tetragrammaton is found throughout the book of Genesis (165x) but it is in Exodus that we first are given an understanding of the meaning of the Name. When Moses is confronted by the scene of a burning bush that is not consumed, he stops to investigate the phenomenon, and is confronted with God speaking from the midst of the bush. God assigns Moses the task of confronting Pharaoh and demanding the release of the Israelite people from Egypt. Moses then asks an important question:

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Ex 3:13–14)

We might naturally wonder at such a question! Why would the people of Israel not know the Name of the God of their fathers? Why would they be asking Moses “Who is the God of our Fathers Who spoke with you?” Would not they have known the God of their fathers? But notice carefully that the question Moses proposes is not “Who (מי, *mi*) is He” but “What (מה, *ma*) is His Name.” As Kaiser points out:

As Martin Buber<sup>1</sup> and others have noted, the interrogative *māh*,

1 Martin Buber, *Kingship of God* (Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 104–06, 189–90.

“what,” is to be distinguished from *mî*, “who.” The latter only asks for the title or designation of an individual, while the former, especially since it is associated with the word “name,” asks the question of the character qualities, power, and abilities resident in the name. What does the “God of our fathers” have to offer in a situation as complex and difficult as ours, was the thrust of their anticipated question.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, God answers Moses אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, “I will be what I will be.” So He instructs Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘אֶהְיֶה (*eh’yeh*) has sent me to you.’” This form of the verb “to be,” an imperfect first person singular, thus reveals the meaning of the Tetragrammaton. But what exactly does it mean? Is this an ontological designation for the God Who never changes? Or the God Who is the source of all being? Such suggestions would be more likely if Moses’ question had been “*Who* should I say sent me” rather than “*What* is the name of the God Who sent me.” The Name is explained to answer the question of whether the One Who had sent Moses would be able to rescue the people from the power of their enemies. Thus, “I will be” is best understood by the repeated promise, found in the very same context of Exodus, namely, “I will be with you” (cf. Ex 3:12; 4:12, 15). Rather than offering an ontological designation or a “static notion of being,”<sup>2</sup> God reveals in His Name a dynamic, active *presence* with His people, the people He will redeem from Egyptian slavery and with whom He will establish an eternal covenant. Indeed, we see this dynamic presence immediately at the exodus, where the pillar of fire and cloud remain with Israel day and night, protecting from harm and leading the nation through the wilderness to the promised Land.

Thus, this is illustrative of all of the revealed names of God. They establish God in various ways and means as the One Who acts on behalf of His people and therefore demonstrate, in His works, the very nature of His being. But, as we will see, the attributes of God are not merely concepts or ideas. They are the very essence of His being revealed to us through His works. In other words, it is not His works that define Him, but His works are the result of Who He is and what He is like. Thus, His works reflect His true being and nature.

#### *God as Spirit*

In philosophical discussions, the question of material and immaterial is asked, seeking to define each. In these philosophical discussions, the word “substance” is used to describe both material and immaterial, even though the English word “substance” tends to evoke a sense of things material. Material things are generally thought of as extended and bound. That is, material things can be measured, but they also have identifiable or defined boundaries. One can tell where something material begins and ends, and in the same way, one can tell where one material object ends and another material object begins.

Not so with the immaterial things. They are not made of matter nor are they extended and they do not have physical boundaries. Generally, the characteristic of immaterial objects is consciousness and/or cognition, that is, immaterial things are thinking things. In contrast, material things don’t think.

1 Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Eerdmans, 1978), p. 107.

2 *Ibid.*