

The Profound Biblical Truth Stephen Hawking Never Meant to Teach Us

The brilliant Stephen Hawking died this week. We have much to learn from him, including what he never intended to teach us.

Typically speaking, theoretical physicists do not become cultural icons, much less pop-culture icons. But Stephen Hawking, who passed away Wednesday, was both.

His book *A Brief History of Time* became a surprise global hit, selling more than 10 million copies. He made regular appearances on television, including hit shows like *The Big Bang Theory* and (in animated form) *The Simpsons*. The film about his life, *The Theory of Everything*, did more than \$100 million at the box office and produced five Academy Award nominations and one win.

Certainly, Stephen Hawking was a brilliant scientist who made significant contributions to his field. But many other scientists who've accomplished just as much remain unknown outside the scientific community. So what explains Hawking's celebrity status?

Yes, he was brilliant. And who could not be inspired by his rising above such a debilitating physical condition that left him wheelchair-bound for decades? But there are other factors to consider.

Many underestimate the place that science holds in today's cultural backdrop. In pre-modern Christendom, the ultimate statement of authority was "thus saith the Lord." Today, the closest statement with that sort of gravitas is "the science is settled," despite how often that claim is misused to stifle debate and advance ideologies.

And also, Stephen Hawking didn't stay in his lane. He was a scientist, but in each of his books and nearly all of his media appearances, he ventured into philosophy, masking metaphysical observations and proclamations in language of scientific certainty.

Hawking regularly opined on what are known as the "ultimate questions," such as "Where did everything come from?" "Why are we here?" "What's the meaning of life?" "Who are we as human beings?" and "What is our ultimate destiny?"

Here's a sampling of the philosophy from this man who once proclaimed philosophy dead:

"Because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing. Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist."

And this: "We are just an advanced breed of monkeys on a minor planet of a very average star. But we can understand the universe. That makes us something very special."

Or this one: "There is no heaven or afterlife ... that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark."

Or my favorite: "The scientific account is complete. Theology is unnecessary."

Stephen Hawking spoke with certainty, but he did not apply the same rigorous thinking to the big worldview questions that he did in his science. Or perhaps more accurately, he tried to answer questions that do not have mathematical answers with the mathematical vocabulary in which he was brilliantly fluent.

In doing so, he looked for answers to ultimate questions where they could not be found. The result were incomplete and often misleading answers to vitally important questions presented

with the Good Housekeeping Seal of scientific authority. At the end of the day, Stephen Hawking, the scientist, peddled a worldview: scientism, the idea that all questions are, and therefore all answers are, scientific in nature.

Still, in a strange way, Stephen Hawking inadvertently taught us that worldview matters. Namely, that there are big questions that haunt humans; that we have much to learn from the natural world, as the psalmist said centuries ago; and that at the end of all our scientific knowledge there is still more to know.

In fact, Hawking once admitted that to know the ultimate why of the universe would be to know the “mind of God.” How tragic that He never acknowledged the God who went to such lengths to make Himself known. {eo}

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