

Sunday Laws and Bible Prophecy

By Jon Paulien

Introduction

COVID-19 has changed many things in this world. Before COVID people who wanted your expertise invited you to get on an airplane and visit their interesting part of the world. After COVID they could invite you to address their people from the comfort of your own office or home. As a result of such invitations I have been able to interact with Seventh-day Adventist people and others in the Bahamas, Newfoundland, Malaysia, the Philippines, Europe and locations I'd rather not mention here. These events have usually involved some question and answer periods and have allowed me to take the pulse of the Seventh-day Adventist movement in ways that might not have been possible otherwise.

The one issue that seems to be on the minds of more SDAs outside the Western world than any other is the concept of future Sunday laws, particularly in the United States. This may come as a surprise to people in the West, who are well aware that Sunday laws are not on the radar in Western public conversation right now. But for many Seventh-day Adventists in the Caribbean, Africa and Asia the concept of Sunday laws is a real and imminent threat of critical importance. The narrative goes something like this: "Ellen White [special messenger to the SDA Church—1827-1915] clearly predicted, based on visions from the Lord, that before the end of time, the US Congress will pass a national Sunday law, enforcing worship on Sunday by all Americans. Laws like this will then be adopted in Europe, and ultimately by the entire world."

The special appeal of this idea is that it would be the single, clearest, and most measurable sign of the End believers in the Second Coming of Jesus have. The idea that the gospel will be preached in the whole world as a witness to all nations is clear, but would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to verify. The idea that famines, earthquakes and pestilences will increase before the End still leaves open the issue of how bad these events have to be in order to qualify as apocalyptic. How massive and frequent are the earthquakes to come? How severe the pestilences? Determining that the End is at hand on the grounds of any particular earthquake, famine or pestilence has proven to be a fool's errand through the centuries. But in contrast to these other "signs" a specific law in the halls of Congress of the United States of America, that is a specific, measurable sign of the End! When such a law is being debated in Congress and seems likely to pass, we can all know that the End is at hand. This concept is clear, simple and very attractive for people who like to know how and when things will end up. It gives them something unique to look for in the news cycle. It feels good to have "inside knowledge" in a matter of such importance.

But does this idea conform to biblical principles of prophetic interpretation? Is the purpose of such a prediction to satisfy our curiosity about the timing of the End? Or are we using the gift of

prophecy in ways it was never intended to be used? One problem with fixing on a detail like this is that it can blind us to the larger picture of prophecy. We can have an unbalanced focus that causes us to forget prophetic features that are more vital to spiritual survival, like a living relationship with Jesus Christ.

In the blogs that follow, I will seek to explore three lines of evidence in relation to the topic. 1) What can we learn about unfulfilled prophecy from fulfilled prophecy? In anticipating specific Sunday laws, are we paying attention to how the Bible itself moves from prediction to fulfillment? We will review my previous study of fulfilled prophecy in the Bible, seeking guidelines that pertain to the specific prediction of a national Sunday law in the USA. 2) We will take a careful look at Revelation 13:13-17, the source passage in the Bible for the idea of a national/international Sunday law. Is that prediction as clear in the Bible as some have thought? Are there other ways that a counterfeit of the true Sabbath could occur? 3) We will take a close look at the key statements in the writings of Ellen White that are used to support the idea of a national Sunday law. How clear are those statements? What in her time and place was she referring to? Are similar conditions in play today?

I look forward to sharing this research with you and will welcome your feedback.

How God Works in the World

Unfulfilled prophecy has been the bane of prophetic interpreters for millennia. Even Seventh-day Adventists have a somewhat checkered history with it, as the Great Disappointment indicates. When we talk about Sunday laws in the final events of earth's history, we are dealing with unfulfilled prophecy. There is a prophetic prediction. The fulfillment has not yet come. So you are dealing with an unfulfilled prophecy. You are projecting from the words of the prophecy to an expected outcome. But history is littered with attempts to do just that, most of which turned out to be false.

So how can or should one be able to speak with confidence about an unfulfilled prophecy? The answer seems obvious once you mention it. You assess the likely outcome of an unfulfilled prophecy on the basis of fulfilled prophecy in the Bible. As you visit the fulfilled prophecies of the Bible you begin to get a sense of how God works in the world, how He moves from prediction to fulfillment, how His earlier actions project what His later actions will be like. Fulfilled prophecy gives us the needed perspective to make educated judgments about unfulfilled prophecy. I have reported on my study of fulfilled prophecy in the book *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* and in an updated and shortened summary in chapter 2 of my book *The Deep Things of God*. I will summarize the principles I discovered in that study here, with a brief proof text or two for each principle. The more detailed argument can be found in the above books. But here I will summarize just enough to address the topic at hand.

Principle One (1): **God is consistent.** This principle should not be controversial. If God is God, one would expect a certain consistency in His words and actions. What God says, He will do. What He does, He tends to repeat. Prophecy is grounded in God's consistency. Because He is consistent, we anticipate that He will do what He says and repeat what He does. God's words project how He will act in the future. God's previous actions project how He will act in the future. Prophecy exists because God can be counted on to do what He says. But this principle needs to be balanced by a second one.

Principle Two (2): **God is not always predictable.** While God is consistent, sometimes He surprises us. Because God is God, we cannot expect to fully fathom His words and actions. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts and His ways are higher than our ways (Isa 55:8-9). There is a consistency in God's actions between creation, the Flood and the Exodus, for example. But careful analysis shows that God does not repeat every detail of the earlier actions in the later actions. Fulfilled prophecy also shows that God does not always fulfill every detail of an earlier pattern or prophecy. So a certain amount of sanctified caution is called for in assessing unfulfilled prophecy. "How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord. . ." (Rom 11:33-34, ESV). The Spirit of God is like the wind, "You cannot tell where it is coming from or where it is going" (John 3:8, NIV). To suggest that God's consistency requires that He fulfill our understanding of every word and detail of a prophecy is to have failed to observe the actual data of Scripture. When we assert that we have mastered the details of the future on the basis of prophecy, we have opened ourselves up to disappointment and even self-deception.

Principle Three (3): **God is creative.** God is not limited to the words and actions of the past. The antitype doesn't simply carry out the type in a point by point correspondence. God can transcend what He has done before, adding new elements not discernable from the prophecy or God's prior actions. In Isaiah 43:18-19 (NIV) it says, "Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!" This passage is in the context of God's promise to repeat the Exodus experience in Israel's future deliverance from Babylon. But He is clear that the fulfillment will not be limited to a repeat of the historical details of the Exodus. God will transcend the Exodus by adding unexpected new aspects to the fulfillment. Taken together, these three principles should caution us not to be overly certain of every detail of a divine prediction before the fulfillment arrives. Let God be God!

Principle Four (4): **God Meets People Where They Are.** Whenever God reveals Himself to a prophet, He does so within the prophet's time, place and circumstances. All language is based on the sum total of a people's experience. So God communicates to the prophets in their vocabulary, not His, for His language would not be understood. This is probably the most biblical principle that is not stated in so many words in the Bible. It is demonstrated, for example, by the four gospels. The one story is told in four different ways to reach a wide variety of minds. And it is demonstrated in the person of Jesus Christ, who came to earth as a First-Century Jew, accustomed to the ways of Galilee. To understand the fulfillment of a prophecy,

one must first understand the language, time and place of the prophet. This is true of Ellen White as much as anyone else God has communicated with.

Principle Five (5): ***God Often Spiritualizes History***. Beginning with the Exodus story, we see a spiritualization of God's historical actions in creation and the Flood (Exod 14:21-22). The basic scenario and language is repeated, but God uses that vocabulary in a figurative or spiritualized way; moving from Adam to Israel, Eden to Canaan, and a chaotic, water-covered world to the spiritual chaos of Israel's slavery in Egypt. In the prophets, the Exodus story becomes the model for God's spiritual transformation of His people in the future. The same kind of thing happens in Revelation 13, where Pentecost, Pharaoh's magicians, Mount Carmel, the creation of Adam, Nebuchanezzar's image and Solomon's apostasy provide context for the great spiritual conflict at the end of time. In the New Testament generally, the things of Israel are applied to the spiritual community of the church and the language of Israel's geography is applied to the whole world. To miss the spiritualization of a prophecy's roots is to miss the point of the prophecy.

Principle Six (6): ***God Uses the Language of the Prophet's Past and Present to Describe the Future***. This is related to principle four, but moves from the general to the specific. God meets people where they are. He speaks to prophets in the language of their times, places and circumstances. So divine predictions of the future are framed as natural extensions of the prophet's time, place and understanding. The Flood would be an unraveling of creation followed by a new creation. The eschatology of Deuteronomy 28 would depend on Israel's obedience or disobedience to the covenant moving forward. The return from Babylon would be a replay of the Exodus. A classic example of this is Isaiah 11:15-16. It is predicted that Israel will be delivered from Assyria when God uses a wind to dry up the Euphrates River so the Israelites can cross in their sandals. The prophecy was fulfilled in Israel's return from Babylon, but not a single detail turned out exactly as stated. Instead of Israel, it was Judah that returned. Instead of Assyria, they returned from Babylon. Instead of a wind, it was Cyrus' engineers that dried up the Euphrates, instead of crossing the dry river bed, God's people crossed the bridges because Cyrus released them from captivity. The first two are explained by Isaiah's location in time (Isaiah's present), when Israel still existed and Assyria dominated the world. God met him where he was. The latter two are explained by the used of Exodus language (Isaiah's past) to describe God's future deliverance.

Understanding the original context of Ellen White's statements regarding a national Sunday law in the US, is critical to rightly anticipating in what way such statements might or might not be fulfilled in our own future. What matters is not what we think a prophecy must mean, but how God actually works in the world, how He moves from prediction to fulfillment.

Principle Seven (7): ***Prophetic Fulfillments Are Most Clearly Understood As or After They Occur***. The record of future predictions on the basis of prophecy has not been a good one. The earlier six principles help explain that sorry track record. Part of the problem is the very purpose of prophecy. Prophecy was not given to satisfy our curiosity about the future (although

that is the way many approach prophecy), it is given to teach us how to live today and to strengthen our faith at the time of fulfillment. Jesus says essentially this in John 14:29: "I have told you now before it happens, so that **when** it does happen you will believe." As or after a prophetic fulfillment, it will become evident what God was doing and faith will be strengthened. The same principle should caution us not to expect crystal clarity regarding the future in advance of the fulfillment.

Principle Eight (8): ***There Are Two Types of Prophecy, Classical and Apocalyptic.*** The way prophecy is fulfilled is impacted by this distinction. Apocalyptic prophecy is seen in the visions of Daniel 2 and 7 and in passages like Revelation 12. It tends to involve a series of historical events running one after another from the prophet's day until the End. Dual or multiple fulfillments should not be expected, because the prophecy covers the whole period from the prophet's day until the End. Apocalyptic prophecies tend to be unconditional, God sharing the large strokes of history that He foresees will take place. In contrast, classical prophecy is seen in books like Isaiah, Hosea and Jeremiah. There is a strong focus on the immediate situation, and if the end of all things is in view, it is a natural extension of the prophet's situation, time and place. There are strong conditional elements, the fulfillment is dependent on human response.

The writings of Ellen White fit the classical style of prophecy. She speaks to her immediate situation, encouraging fidelity to God and to Scripture. Where she speaks of the future, she speaks in terms of a natural extension of the immediate situation, rather than clear predictions of things that don't exist in her day. For example, she does not foresee nuclear war or power, she doesn't speak of cell phones, computers, the internet, Islamic terrorism, space travel, World Wars I and II, or the rise of secularism and post-modernism. When she describes police action at the end of time, the police are wearing swords, something more common in her day than today! It does not mean God was incapable of sharing our future with her, only that such a revelation was not central to her prophetic purpose, encouraging faithfulness to God and careful attention to the Scriptures. And regarding prophecy she says, "The promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional." *Last-Day Events*, 38. A good example of conditional prophecy was her declaration in 1856 that some with her that day would live to see Jesus come. Obviously, the conditions for that prophecy were never met and we are still here in 2021. Critics have often used that prediction to accuse her of being a false prophet, but the accusation is based instead on an unbiblical understanding of how prophecy works, or in other words, how God works in the world.

Satan's Methods in the Final Crisis (Rev 13:13-17)

The portion of Scripture that is widely cited as predicting Sunday laws at the end of time is Revelation 13:13-17. I will take a fresh look at the passage with Adventist beliefs about this element of the future in mind. Let me say first, that a church's beliefs on a topic should be exegetically defensible, but do not need to be exegetically compelling. Doctrine comes under

the heading of systematic theology, where Scripture, tradition, reason and experience all play a role. Not all Adventist and Christian beliefs are grounded in biblical exegesis alone. For Adventists, insights from the pioneers, current understandings, and the teachings of Ellen White all play a role in formulating doctrine. But, in Adventist understanding, doctrine must not contradict Scripture, it must at least be defensible in light of Scripture.

Since Revelation never uses the words Sabbath or Sunday, it is possible that exegetical certainty in the matter of Sunday laws at the End is not available from Scripture alone. But such lack of exegetical clarity is true of many doctrines. For example, the word Trinity does not appear in the Bible, and nowhere does the Bible contain many of the Chalcedonian formulas with regard to Jesus Christ. But while they go beyond the specific data of Scripture, these doctrines can be defended from the evidence of Scripture. They are a contextualization of Scripture in light of the questions and issues raised in the centuries after the New Testament. And that is sufficient for believers to make a commitment to such teachings, even if we “see through a glass darkly.” We will find that the concept of Sunday laws at the end of time does not contradict Scripture, it is compatible with the evidence, even if the evidence is not compelling.

The key text is Revelation 13:13-17 (my translation): “And he [the land beast] does great signs, so much so that he causes fire to come down out of heaven to earth in the presence of men. And **he deceives** those who live on the earth because of the signs which he was given to do . . . saying to those who live on the earth that they should make an image to the beast. . . . And he [the land beast] was permitted to give breath to the image of the beast, in order that the image of the beast might speak and might cause whoever does not worship the image of the beast **to be killed**. And he [the land beast] **controls everyone** . . . so that he might place a mark upon their right hands or upon their foreheads, so that **no one might be able to buy or sell** except the one who has the mark, the name of the beast or the number of his name.

This passage exhibits the two outstanding characteristics of Satan’s method for persuading people at the end of time. In Revelation 13:13-14 there is the method of deception. Satan brings fire down from heaven in a false Pentecost or a counterfeit Mount Carmel showdown. He uses great signs to persuade the people of earth that he is the true God, the one worthy of worship. He is not so in fact, but he uses “signs and lying wonder” to deceive (see also 2 Thess 2:9) those who live on the earth. In Revelation 13:15-17, however, he uses the method of intimidation or force. Those who refuse to worship the image of the beast are to be killed. Those who refuse to receive the mark of the beast will not be able to buy or sell. So Satan’s methods are force and deception. This is in direct contrast with God’s methods. God always speaks the truth, and never forces anyone to follow or worship him. The final crisis is a showdown between rival claims to be God and two different methods of persuasion.

The Image of the Beast (Rev 13:13-15)

The deception of Revelation 13:13-14 results in the formation of an image to and of the beast, presumably the first beast of Revelation 13 that came up out of the sea. “And he [the land beast] was permitted to **give breath to the image** of the beast, in order that the image of the beast might speak and might cause whoever does not worship the image of the beast to be killed.” Rev 13:15. Typical of Jewish apocalyptic literature, the book of Revelation never quotes the Old Testament, but it alludes to it very frequently, using key words, phrases, ideas and structures to signal the reading to incorporate OT knowledge into the interpretation of a passage. We saw such allusions to the OT in 13:13-14: the experience of Elijah on Mount Carmel (fire from heaven) and the deceptive miracles of Pharaoh’s magicians.

The combination of image and breath is an unmistakable allusion to the early chapters of Genesis. God created male and female in His own image (Gen 1:26-27), using His breath to install the software of life into Adam’s earthy body. More than just oxygen, God was installing the life principle, with its unique personality and traits and that life principle included the “image of God.” That phrase is not used for the creation of animals. So there was something very godlike about Adam and Eve. They reflected God’s character in their own.

The beast from the sea is in the image of the dragon (Rev 13:1, cf. 12:4), which is also defined as the ancient serpent, Satan (Rev 12:9). So the phrase “image of the beast” implies a similar relationship to Satan as Adam originally had to God. Revelation 13:15 is telling us that at the end of time Satan will seek to implant his image into the human race in contrast to the image and character of God. Just as God’s breath installed His design into the human race, Satan at the End will seek to install his own design into the human race. The contrast could not be more stark, as noted in the previous blog in this series. Satan’s character prized lies and unreality (deception—Rev 13:13-14), intimidation and force (Rev 13:12, 15-17). Both qualities are summed up by Jesus in John 8:44. In contrast, God always speaks the truth (Rev 3:14; 15:3) and prizes human freedom (Rev 22:17). God never forces anyone. So the two sides in the final conflict grow increasingly apart as they model more and more the character of the God they worship.

The ultimate outcome of the formation of an image to the beast is to exhibit the murderous character of Satan (John 8:44) in a death decree. When the image of the beast comes to life it will “cause whoever does not worship the image of the beast to be killed.” Rev 13:15. This is a clear allusion to the Plain of Dura event in Daniel 3. There an image was set up for worship. All who would not worship Nebuchanezzar’s image would be thrown into the fiery furnace. Likewise, at the end of time, a decree goes forth that all who would not worship the image of the beast, all who will not conform to the beast’s (Satan’s) character, will be killed. Two other OT death decrees may also be in mind here, the lion’s den incident of Daniel 6, and the genocidal decree of Haman in the book of Esther (3:6, 13). The final era of earth’s history will include a replay of earlier attempts to destroy God’s people. But that is not all that Satan has in mind for the End-time.

The Forehead and the Hand (Rev 13:16-17)

The text of Revelation 13 continues with verse 16: “And he [the land beast] controls everyone . . . so that he might place a mark upon their **right hands** or upon their **foreheads**. . . .” In the biblical world the forehead represents the mind, the will, the personality. The hand is representative of action. So these symbols represent two kinds of response to the call to worship the image of the beast. There are those who are fully committed to the agenda of Satan and his allies and there are others who don’t really care, but they go along in order to preserve their jobs and their lives (Rev 13:16-17).

The central theme of Revelation, chapters 13 and 14, is worship. Revelation 13:14 alludes to the showdown over worship at Mount Carmel. This portion of the book makes reference to worship of the dragon (Rev 13:4), the beast from the sea (Rev 13:4, 8, 12; 14:9, 11) and the image of the beast (Rev 13:15; 14:9, 11). In all, there are exactly seven occurrences of the word “worship” in the central part of Revelation. In contrast is the single call to worship “Him who made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and the fountains of water.” Rev 14:7. The call to worship the image of the beast is a universal one, it goes out to the full range of social classes. “And he [the land beast] controls everyone; the small and the great, the rich and the poor, the free and the slave; so that he might place a mark upon their right hands or upon their foreheads. . . .” Rev 13:17.

Along with a willingness to worship the image of the beast, a new element is introduced. A mark is placed on all who are willing to worship the image of the beast. The mark is defined as the name of the beast or the number of his name. These likely correspond to the forehead and the hand. Names in the Hebrew context represent character. Some are marked because of their heart and soul commitment to Satan’s agenda to mold human beings in his own image (name on forehead). Others are marked because they are willing to go along with that agenda to preserve their own lives and prosperity in this world (hand and number).

These texts reflect a sharp polarization in the world as we approach the End-time. Revelation projects three types of people in the world at the end. One group is the saints who are called by many names (the remnant, the 144,000, the great multitude, the kings of the east, the called, chosen and faithful followers of the Lamb). The second group is a worldwide alliance of religion, called Babylon, the Great City, the Great Prostitute, the woman who rides the beast, and is represented by the unholy trinity; the dragon, the beast and the false prophet (Rev 16:13). The third group are those without a heart and soul commitment to either camp. These are the secular, political and military powers of the world, also named by many names and symbols (Euphrates River, kings of the world, many waters, kings of the earth, the beast of Rev 17, the ten horns, the cities of the nations, seven mountains and seven kings). When these secular powers agree to enforce the death decree of Revelation 13:15, they make a “hand” commitment to the beast and his image. Satan desires worship from all, but he is willing to

settle for a forced worship, a self-centered worship. The contrast between his character and God's could not be more stark. This contrast is further underlined as we explore the meaning of the mark of the beast in Revelation.

The Mark and the Seal

How shall we understand the "mark of the beast" in the context of Revelation 13? The most obvious parallel to the mark is the seal of God. The seal is placed on the foreheads of God's servants (the 144,000) to protect them from Satan's destructive efforts when the four winds of the earth are released (Rev 7:1-3). An evident parallel to the seal of God is the 144,000 having the Lamb's name and His Father's name written on their foreheads. In the Hebrew context names are associated with a person's character. So the seal of God seems to have something to do with the character of those being sealed.

This is supported by the wider use of sealing in the New Testament. In Ephesians 1:13, sealing by the Holy Spirit is the consequence of a faith response to the gospel. It represents the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. This sealing is a lifelong experience of the Spirit after conversion (Eph 4:30). It is the evidence that a person truly is known by God and belongs to Him (2 Tim 2:19). In the Second Christian Century, sealing was associated with baptism. So the seal of God has to do with the character transformation that happens as a consequence of a genuine relationship with God.

Revelation 7 and 14 place this sealing in an end-time context, as does Ellen White: ""(The seal of God) is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved." *SDABC, vol. 4, 1161, Last-Day Events, 219-220*. Ellen White understands the last-day sealing to be deepening of commitment and a completion of Christian maturity. Those who have to pass through the trials of the end-time cannot be the kind of believers Paul talks about in Ephesians 4:14, "Tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine. . . ." Likewise, at the End, Satan is forming his image into those committed to his side of the conflict. That makes the mark of the beast the mirror counterpart of the seal of God. The three angels (Rev 14:6-12) and the three frogs (Rev 16:13-14) both go out to the nations of the world. The end result is three types of people, as mentioned earlier. Those fully committed to God (the sealed), those fully committed in opposition to God (marked on the forehead), and those who go along with the beast and its image in order to preserve their lives and economic opportunities. Just as the seal of God provides protection to God's people at the End (Rev 7:1-3, cf. Ezek 9:1-7), so the mark of the beast provides "protection" against the death decree and economic boycott of Revelation 13:15-17.

There is one further element to the mark of the beast. It is part of the beast's counterfeit of the first four commandments of the Decalogue. The forehead and the hand echoes Moses' call for Israel's complete commitment to the commandments of God (Deut 6:4-8). In contrast, the

beast and his image violate the first four commandments. The first commandment says to have no other gods before Yahweh. The dragon and the beast seek to be worshiped as gods (Rev 13:4, 8). The second commandment forbids the worship of images, the beast sets up an image to be worshiped (Rev 13:15). The third commandment forbids taking the Lord's name in vain, the beast is full of blasphemy (Rev 13:1, 5-6). The mark of the beast is in defiance of the Sabbath, which is brought in on God's side in Rev 14:7 (cf. Exod 20:11). If the law of God is a transcript of His character, you can see what is happening here, a rejection of God's character and an affirmation of Satan's. Satan's character, in contrast with God's, will be fully revealed in the final conflict.

The previous paragraph underlines that the Sabbath is a crucial issue in the final conflict. It also suggests that some counterfeit of the Sabbath will be central to the beast's actions in the same conflict. What is less clear in the text is exactly what form that counterfeit will take. I can think of four options: 1) Another day (as in Sunday), 2) no day is a Sabbath (abolished), 3) every day is a Sabbath (not much different than two), and 4) force work or forbid worship on Sabbath. When dealing with Revelation 13 Ellen White normally works from number 1) above, but on at least one occasion mentions number 4). In the following we will look at the evidence of Ellen White herself in the context of American religious history.

The Principles and Ellen White

As we get into the key statements of Ellen White on national Sunday law legislation in the USA at the End, we must keep in mind that it is an unfulfilled prophecy. Human beings have an extremely poor record when it comes to predicting future events on the basis of unfulfilled prophecy. To improve on that dismal record, it is critical to keep in mind the biblical evidence regarding fulfilled prophecies. In the fulfilled prophecies of the Bible we have a record of how God moves from prediction to fulfillment. These fulfilled prophecies pointed us to a number of principles that can help us avoid the mistakes of the past when it comes to prophecies that are not yet fulfilled.

The most important of those principles for our purpose are principles 2, 4 and 6. I will review them briefly here. Principle 2 states that God is not always predictable. The fulfillment is often somewhat of a surprise when it comes. God does not fulfill every detail of His predictions for a number of reasons. The most important one is that most prophecies are conditional (Jer 18:7-10, LDE 38—Ellen White says there that “all God's promises and threatenings” are conditional). Whenever a prophet speaks of political events on earth those prophecies are conditional, because fulfillment depends on the behavior of the nations or entities involved. If an ungodly entity repents, God will not perform the doom He had promised. If a godly entity falls into apostasy, God will not fulfill the positive promises He has made.

Principle 4 is that God meets people where they are. That means that prophecies contain elements that are particularly focused on the time and place of the prophet. Prophecies need

to be read in the light of the original context in which they were given. Principle 6 is related to principle 4. It states that God uses the language of the prophet's present and past to describe the prophet's future. That means that prophecy is always a natural extension of that prophet's time and place. So another reason God is not always predictable is because the language, time, place and circumstances of the original prediction can change enough over time that the outcome will not be exactly as expected. This is evidenced over and over in the Old Testament prophets, with Isaiah 11:15-16 being the most dramatic case, as noted in earlier blogs in this series.

Many Seventh-day Adventists treat the predictions of Ellen White as if they were exempt from these biblical patterns. Anything she says about the future is fixed and unchangeable simply because she said it. But that kind of position on inspiration not only fails to account for the biblical evidence listed above, it places Ellen White's inspiration in jeopardy. The classical case is her statement in 1856 that some people then present would be translated alive when Jesus returns (*Life Sketches*, 321). If one sees Ellen White's predictions as fixed and unconditional, this calls her inspiration and truthfulness into question. But anyone familiar with the patterns of fulfilled prophecy in the Bible would immediately think of Jonah. Prophecies (such as the timing of the Second Coming) that are subject to human response are conditional, even if the conditions are not stated. Her inspiration is not in question should every detail of a prediction not be fulfilled to the letter. With that in mind we are ready to review her key statements regarding a national Sunday law in the US Congress at the end of time.

The Key Statements of Ellen White

The first of the best-known statements of Ellen White on Sunday laws at the End is in *The Great Controversy*, page 573. I will quote the full statement and then make some brief comments: "In the movements now in progress in the United States to secure for the institutions and usages of the church the support of the state, Protestants are following in the steps of papists. Nay, more, they are opening the door for the papacy to regain in Protestant America the supremacy which she has lost in the Old World. And that which gives greater significance to this movement is the fact that the principal object contemplated is the enforcement of Sunday observance--a custom which originated with Rome, and which she claims as the sign of her authority. It is the spirit of the papacy--the spirit of conformity to worldly customs, the veneration for human traditions above the commandments of God--that is permeating the Protestant churches and leading them on to do the same work of Sunday exaltation which the papacy has done before them."

Note first that this statement concerns "the enforcement of Sunday observance" in the United States. It is something that had been commonly done in Europe when the Roman Church had much more authority there than she ever had in the United States. But in this case the driving force behind the drive for enforcement was the Protestant leadership of the US government in the Nineteenth Century. Ellen White is not talking about some distant, future event, the

movements to enforce Sunday observance were “now in progress in the United States”. She was speaking about current events in her context and the outcome of those current events for the future.

She returns to this matter on page 579 of *The Great Controversy*: “It has been shown that the United States is the power represented by the beast with lamblike horns, and that this prophecy will be fulfilled when the United States shall enforce Sunday observance, which Rome claims as the special acknowledgment of her supremacy. But in this homage to the papacy the United States will not be alone. The influence of Rome in the countries that once acknowledged her dominion is still far from being destroyed. And prophecy foretells a restoration of her power. . . . In both the Old and the New World, the papacy will receive homage in the honor paid to the Sunday institution, that rests solely upon the authority of the Roman Church.

“Since the middle of the nineteenth century, students of prophecy in the United States have presented this testimony to the world. In the events now taking place is seen a rapid advance toward the fulfillment of the prediction.”

In this statement she is clearly making reference to Revelation 13 when she mentions the beast with the lamblike horns (Rev 13:11). She indicates that this prophecy will be fulfilled when the United States as a nation shall enforce Sunday observance. In some form this will also occur in the “Old World”, a common reference in Ellen White’s time for Europe. And once again, she makes it clear that this is not some distant, future event. The movement toward Sunday enforcement is already in motion and moving rapidly toward an outcome that would include both the United States and Europe. Her prophecy of the future was a natural extension of things occurring in her day.

All in all Ellen White makes perhaps a hundred references to Sabbath-Sunday issues at the end of time. This is central to her picture of the End. But GC 579 is different from all the earlier ones, and it has attracted special attention for that reason. What is different about this statement is that it is not referring merely to Sunday legislation here and there in various states, but it would be a national occurrence. To see the significance of this difference, it is helpful to know that the story of the *Great Controversy* came in seven editions (*Early Writings, Spiritual Gifts, Spirit of Prophecy, Story of Redemption, and three editions of The Great Controversy*—1884, 1888, 1911). The first five editions (through the 1884 edition of GC) speak in general about Sunday legislation without the specifics of a national Sunday law legislated in Congress. It is only in the year 1888, the same year that Senator Henry Blair introduced a national Sunday law into the US Congress, that we see the addition of a national movement to enforce Sunday observance in her projections of the End. I have gone through two collections of all of Ellen White’s statements on Sunday laws. I have found only two statements about a national Sunday law, and both of them were written in the year 1888 (later statements, like the 1911 edition of GC, are reprints of the earlier statements).

Ellen White returns to the issue of Sunday laws at the end of time on page 592 of *The Great Controversy*: “The dignitaries of church and state will unite to bribe, persuade, or compel all classes to honor the Sunday. The lack of divine authority will be supplied by oppressive enactments. Political corruption is destroying love of justice and regard for truth; and even in free America, rulers and legislators, in order to secure public favor, will yield to the popular demand for a law enforcing Sunday observance. Liberty of conscience, which has cost so great a sacrifice, will no longer be respected. In the soon-coming conflict. . . (Rev 12:17).” This statement is less specific than the previous one. In GC 592 Ellen White foresees church and state working together in America toward universal observance of Sunday. This observance will be supported by “oppressive enactments” in the plural. But her use of the singular in “a law enforcing Sunday observance” is compatible with the previous idea of national legislation. In this passage she once again underlines her understanding that this is a “soon-coming conflict,” and this time supports the term “conflict” with a quotation of Revelation 12:17.

A brief statement on this topic was included in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary: “The decree enforcing the worship of this day is to go forth to all the world. In a limited degree, it has already gone forth. In several places the civil power is speaking with the voice of a dragon, just as the heathen king spoke to the Hebrew captives.” There are two elements here that are not in *The Great Controversy*. First, she states that the decree enforcing worship of Sunday is to be worldwide, not just in the United States. Second, even that development was already in progress at the time she wrote this statement. It was a live development in the time when she was living.

The final statement I will share with you here is the most specific of all. It was included in the *Review and Herald* toward the close of 1888. “When our nation, in its legislative councils, shall enact laws to bind the consciences of men in regard to their religious privileges, **enforcing Sunday observance**, and bringing oppressive power to bear against those who keep the seventh-day Sabbath, the law of God will, to all intents and purposes, be made void in our land; and national apostasy will be followed by national ruin. . . . If, in our land of boasted freedom, **a Protestant government** should sacrifice every principle which enters into its Constitution, and propagate papal falsehood and delusion, well may we plead, “It is time for thee, Lord, to work, for they have made void thy law.” The United States, in its legislative councils (the House of Representatives and the Senate), will enact laws to enforce Sunday observance. Such a possibility was right before her at that time, in Senator Blair’s bill. But she makes one additional comment that will prove interesting. In her understanding, this legislation will be the action of a “Protestant government,” which was also a reality in her day.

This is a summary of, in my view, the five most pertinent statements regarding the subject at hand. Will these predictions necessarily be fulfilled simply because she said so? From a believer’s perspective that would be the simplest answer. But the scholar raises the uncomfortable point, do the biblical principles regarding fulfilled prophecy suggest some caution in drawing that conclusion?

Ellen White and the Biblical Prophetic Principles

The standard assumption among many Adventists is that every single prediction made by Ellen White must be fulfilled at some point in the future, without conditions. This position is similar to that the Pharisees applied to the Old Testament in Jesus' day. We all know how that worked out. Considering both the principles of prophetic interpretation of the Bible and the realities of history since the 1880s, I would suggest we exercise a little caution before uncritically embracing the standard assumptions about future Sunday laws in the United States and elsewhere. If Ellen White were alive today, there is at least a chance that her depiction of the End would be somewhat different than it was in the 1880s. Let's look at the evidence for that caution.

First of all, an unconditional approach to Ellen White's predictions is contrary to the evidence of fulfilled prophecies in the Bible. We noticed there that (2) God is not always predictable, that (4) God meets people where they are, that (6) God uses the language of the prophet's past and present to describe the future, and that (7) fulfillments of prophecy are best understood as or after the fulfillment. I would argue that an appropriate interpretation of Ellen White's unfulfilled prophecies would be and should be very much in line with the biblical evidence.

Let's look briefly at the context of her most specific statements regarding the national Sunday law in the late 1880s. At that time, both SDAs and many other Americans see three great threats in the public square. The first was the fear of Protestant apostasy; that Protestantism in America would lose focus on the principles of the Reformation, which also undergirded the founding principles of the American nation. The second major threat was the rise of Roman Catholicism in the United States. In 1840 Catholics made up about 5% of the US population. By the mid-1880s, due to massive immigration from places like Ireland, Italy and Poland, Catholics made up 17% of the US population and Catholicism was flexing its political muscles in the US for the first time. This alarmed both Protestants and Adventists. The love for bars and carnivals that Catholics brought with them from Europe caused many to feel that the social order was being undermined. The third major threat was the rise of spiritualism as a major influence in the political discourse of the time. Ellen White's famous statement about "reaching hands across the gulf" names all three of these threats (GC 588). A union of these three forces was seen as the greatest threat to both Adventism and the American republic.

Protestantism reacted to these developments in two ways, one more popular than the other with Adventists. First was the drive to ban the production and sale of alcohol in the United States, a movement that came later to be called Prohibition. Ellen White found common cause with the Women's Christian Temperance Union on this issue and she sometimes spoke at their rallies. But the WCTU and other Protestant entities also saw Sunday legislation as a way to preserve America's character as a Protestant nation. They sensed that the country was changing and felt that Sunday laws was a way to hold back the tide. Ellen White's most famous statements on Sunday laws were written in the midst of the above developments. Thus, they are to be understood in the light of the biblical principles outlined at the beginning. God was

using Ellen White's past and present language and experiences to paint a picture of the future. Her outline of that future was, therefore, a natural extension of her time and place. Her visions met her squarely where she was. Given how much the world has changed in the last 130 years, it would be surprising if the outcome of the end-time turned out to be more predictable than the prophecies fulfilled in Bible times. "The promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional." LDE 38.

The World of Ellen White

The world that Ellen White experienced in the 1880s was soon to change dramatically. Protestantism remained a major, if not dominant, force in American politics for a number of decades. But after the failure of national Sunday legislation in the period of 1888-1890, Catholicism retreated from being a major player in the American political scene until Vatican II and the rise of John F. Kennedy in the late 1950s. And while spiritualism has remained at the fringes of American consciousness, its role in the public square rapidly diminished after 1890. With Ellen White's death, a new threat to the American way of life became increasingly powerful, the rise of secularism/liberalism. It offered a direct threat to the "Protestant government" of the United States that was largely taken for granted when *Great Controversy* was first written. Protestantism fought back during the Liberalism/Fundamental controversy, but the Scopes trial in the 1920s and the collapse of Prohibition in the early 1930s signaled the death knell of Protestant dominance in American politics. The three main threats to the American way of life in the 1880s were now supplanted by a much greater threat, that the Christian values upon which America was founded would be totally set aside in favor of a pluralistic, secular order.

Another major feature of Ellen White's world was colonialism. Virtually the entire world was either ruled by nominally Christian powers like England, France, Spain and Germany, or deeply influenced by the economic and political power these European nations wielded. The concept of an international Sunday law was very conceivable in the colonial era. But the colonial era began to unravel in the wake of World War II, and European dominance of Africa and Asia had almost totally evaporated by the early 1960s. The world today is a very different world than the world of Ellen White in the late Nineteenth Century. And that is a serious problem for anyone who wishes to project the details of her world into the Twenty-First Century. God meets people where they are. It is reasonable to expect that a prophetic voice arising today would say at least some things that would surprise us.

The scenario Ellen White projects in *Great Controversy* is deeply embedded in the very specific politics and issues of the 1880s and a little after. It addresses the very things the nation at large was discussing and includes all the major political players of the time. It is not the story of some far future for the United States of America, that story is a natural extension of Ellen White's time and place. I remind you of her own statements in that regard. What she wrote about in GC

concerned “movements now in progress” (GC 573). “In the events now taking place is seen a rapid advance toward the fulfillment of the prediction. . . .” (GC 579). What she was describing was a “soon-coming conflict” (GC 592). In fact, “The decree. . . . has already gone forth” (7 SDABC 976). And it would be enforced by “a Protestant government” (RH, December 18, 1888). The world has changed massively in the last 125 years. Like the writers of the New Testament, Ellen White did not perceive the long period of time that would come after her. In fact, there is very little in her writings that directly describes the world in which we live.

Like the biblical prophets, when Ellen White describes the future it is in the language, time, place, and circumstances of the time in which she wrote. This is illustrated by the fact that language about a national Sunday law in Congress only appears in the immediate context of a bill in the Senate to establish a national Sunday law. Before that she speaks in very general terms about Sunday legislation, language appropriate to a time in which there were many local Sunday laws, but no push for a national one. As noted earlier, there were seven editions of the Great Controversy vision and she updated each edition to reflect the changes in the world current in that time. This is exactly the pattern that you find when you look at the fulfilled prophecies of the Bible.

You will look in vain for any clear description in Ellen White’s writings of the world in which we live. There has been more change in the last hundred years than in the previous 6000, but you wouldn’t detect that in any detail in her writings. Yet you won’t find any explicit descriptions of nuclear war or nuclear power. There is no mention of computers, the internet, or cell phones. There is no mention of space travel by human means. There is no description of Communism, the two world wars, or Islamic terrorism. There is no specific description of an America that is becoming increasingly secular or post-modern. This is exactly what you would expect on the basis of fulfilled prophecy in the Bible. Prophecy was not given to satisfy our curiosity about the future. It was given to teach us how to live today. When we use prophecy for other purposes, things inevitably go wrong.

Ellen White, A Classical Prophet

One thing I have come to realize in recent discussions is that many people who read Ellen White treat her writings as if they were apocalyptic prophecy, and therefore not subject to the Bible’s principles for interpreting classical prophecy. There are visions she describes that remind one of Revelation 4-5 (heavenly journeys), but nothing like Daniel 2 or Jewish visions like 4 Ezra and 1 Enoch. Her work fits the pattern of classical prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Hosea. She addresses her immediate situation with passion and a desire for change on the part of her readers. When she projects into the future, it is never a detailed account of specific things beyond her time, but a natural extension of the world she is living in.

The important implication of this is that her predictions of the future, insofar as they concern human affairs, are conditional upon those affairs. This principle is stated unequivocally in

Jeremiah 18:7-10: “If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it,⁸ and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it.⁹ And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it,¹⁰ and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it.” This is God speaking directly and explaining how He operates (Jer 18:6). When speaking about the interactions among nations and powerful entities, God’s predictions are conditional upon the response of those nations and entities. To take such prophecies as outlining the future with absolute certainty is to take them too far. They may, in fact, be fulfilled in exact detail, but they also may not. God is not always predictable. As Ellen White herself frequently stated, “circumstances alter cases.”

In my research for this series I ran across a statement of Ellen White that shocked me. It was completely counter to the strong emphasis of *Great Controversy* on the topic. But when you note the date of the statement in light of the prophetic principles we outlined earlier, the statement makes perfect sense. “Then I saw the mother of harlots. . . . ***She has had her day and it is past***, and her daughters, the Protestant sects, were next to come on the stage and act out the same mind that the mother had when she persecuted the saints.” MS 15, 1850. When she speaks of the “mother of harlots” she is clearly alluding to Revelation 17:4-5, which she applied consistently to the papacy. In her view, as of the year 1850, the papacy “has had her day and it is past.” Protestant America would play the role in the end-time that the papacy had played in the Middle Ages.

This statement makes perfect sense in 1850. The population of Catholics in the United States was about 5% in 1840. They were a small, insignificant player on the stage of American politics. But immigration from places like Ireland, Italy and Poland changed that dynamic in the decades that followed. By the year 1890, the proportion of Catholics in the US population had reached 17%. They could no longer be ignored. But in 1850 the papacy appeared to be a spent force, having just gone through the humiliating captivity of 1798. Since the demise of the “mother of harlots” is stated in Revelation 17:16, Ellen White may at that time have placed Revelation 17 in the past as Uriah Smith did. If the end had come in the 1850s, it appears that the papacy would not have played the role in the end-time that *Great Controversy* portrays for it in the 1880s. Her 1850 prediction is a natural extension of that time and place.

Another surprising statement comes from 1886, a little before the peak of Sunday agitation in Congress. “. . . the Christian world has sanctioned (Satan’s) efforts by adopting this child of the papacy— the Sunday institution. They have nourished it and continue to nourish it, until Protestantism shall give the hand of fellowship to the Roman power. Then there will be ***a law against the Sabbath of God’s creation***. . . .” RH, March 9, 1886. In this statement, the key element is not so much a law requiring Sunday observance, but a law forbidding Sabbath observance. Here she follows the anti-Sabbath option for Revelation 13 that we have mentioned previously. This emphasis would increase in the 1890s and early 1900s as the drive to legislate national observance of Sunday lost steam. When local Sunday laws came to her

attention, instead of telling people to resist them, she said use the day for missionary work. Don't arouse the ire of neighbors and authorities by conspicuously doing manual labor on that day. It is no direct threat to your keeping of the Sabbath.

As you look at all the statements Ellen White makes regarding Sunday laws, the key statements regarding Sunday legislation in Congress are clustered in the year 1888, when that was a live and national issue. As you observe the trend of her statements over seventy years, it fits the pattern of the classical prophet: speaking directly and prophetically to the living issues of her time. As with Scripture, this in no way diminishes the value of such prophecies for today. It simply impacts the way that we read them and the way that we should apply them today.

Undermining God's Purpose for Prophecy

The evidence drawn from fulfilled prophecy in the Bible shows us that prophecy is given as a natural extension of the prophet's time and place. God meets people where they are and the prophecy engages the world as the prophet experiences it. Because that world is in constant change, now more than ever, we can expect that some elements of a prophecy are not fulfilled, because the conditions for fulfillment have not been met. In the case of the expectation that national Sunday laws will some day be enacted in the US Congress, the conditions for that were very strong in the late 1880s, but none of those conditions were in place any longer by the time of World War I. If such Sunday laws do occur in our future, they would occur in a world that is vastly different than the one Ellen White was familiar with.

Reviewing the biblical evidence on the mark of the beast (Rev 13:13-17), we concluded that there were four exegetical possibilities for fulfillment in the fact that the mark is contrasted with the seal of God and the Sabbath. It could reflect laws related to worship of another day (Sunday, for example). Two other options would be that every day is a Sabbath or no day is a Sabbath. The fourth option is laws forbidding Sabbath worship. All four of these options are exegetically defensible as ways to fulfill the text of Revelation 13. As we have seen, most statements on the topic by Ellen White see Sunday laws as the fulfillment of Revelation 13 but some statements portray Sunday laws as less of a threat and laws forbidding worship on the Sabbath as the greater threat. Statements regarding national Sunday laws in Congress are few and they are clustered in the period around 1888 where they are a logical extension of the situation in place at that point in time.

There are two ways to undermine God's purpose for prophecy. One is to ignore the prophecies of the Bible and Ellen White. This is widely seen as a problem among students of the Bible. But another way to undermine the Bible is popular among enthusiasts of the Bible and, therefore, harder to see as a threat. It is to over-specify the details of a prophecy to the point where a particular scenario become fixed in people's minds to the point that the fulfillment comes as a surprise and even a deception to the very ones anticipating it.

This happened in Jesus' day. The Pharisees in Jesus' day were avid students of prophecy. We know this from books that exist to this day, like Fourth Ezra, Second Baruch and First (or Ethiopic) Enoch. These books reflect a mindset of deep consideration of the prophecies, leading to charting of events leading up to Messiah. Failing to understand how fulfilled prophecy works in the Bible, the Pharisees built up an expectation, based on study of the Bible, that caused them to reject Jesus when He came, because He did not fulfill their biblical expectations. This was a tragic error, and it could have been avoided by more attention to the conditionality of classical prophecy and the way prophecies are a natural extension of the prophet's time and place. The messianic prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus, but in a way different from the way the Pharisees expected.

My concern is that Adventists could be making a similar mistake today in investing so much energy in the idea that a national Sunday law in the US Congress will be the specific trigger event of the end-time. This view is understandable as it gives us a measurable specific that is easily observed. But the conditions for such a law have passed and should it never happen exactly that way, some serious, sincere Adventist students of prophecy could miss the real thing when it happens, because their specific expectations are not met. More has changed in the world over the last hundred years than in the previous 6000. The expectation that this will have no impact at all on the way prophecy is fulfilled is uncertain at best. World wide Sunday legislation could still happen but fixing on that single detail (Congressional legislation) as the key could prove to be a major distraction when the time comes.

Summary and Conclusion

We began this series with the observation that many Seventh-day Adventists have a unique sign of the End that they feel uniquely prepares them to be ready for the return of Jesus. That sign is the passage of a national Sunday law in the Congress of the United States of America. Unlike many prophecies in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, this one is specific and measurable. If it happens or does not happen, we will all know. Members in far-flung parts of the world are probing both the news and underground "sources" to weigh the likelihood of such a law in the USA from year to year. This has been going on now for many decades, probably as much as a century. But is such an outcome in its Great Controversy context the absolute certainty that many deem it to be?

We examined the principles of prophetic interpretation that can be observed through the study of fulfilled prophecies in the Bible (for detail see *The Deep Things of God*, chapter two). These underline that prophecies regarding specific historical events are conditional. God meets people where they are. Prophecies are, therefore, couched in the language of the prophet's time and place. The details are a natural extension of the prophet's time and place. God does not always carry out every detail of prophetic predictions. Those awaiting a Sunday law in the US Congress are assuming that Ellen White's historical predictions are different from those of

the Bible, they are not conditional. They must be fulfilled in detail exactly as projected. But this assumption contradicts Ellen White's own counsel: ". . . the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional" (LDE 38). Conditionality warns us not to take the historical details of prophecy as absolute certainties ahead of time. Prophecy is best understood as or after it happens (John 13:19; 14:29).

We then examined Revelation 13, the passage in the Bible that is cited as evidence of such a Sunday law. We noted that Sunday laws at the end of time are a plausible reading of Revelation 13, but they are not the only possible reading of the mark of the beast passage. Seeing Sunday laws in Revelation 13 is exegetically defensible, but it is not exegetically compelling. The mark of the beast concept is open-ended enough to allow God the freedom to fulfill the prophecy in more than one way. So caution is advised in advance of the fulfillment. We should not close our understanding of a prediction before the fulfillment comes.

We then looked at Ellen White's Sunday law statements in light of the history of her time. The idea of a national Sunday law in Congress was very relevant in the 1880s and her statements to that effect all occur around the year 1888, when there was a bill in the Senate to impose a national Sunday law. She makes no such statements in earlier years, but sees local laws as evidence of something bigger to come (the something to come is not specified). We noted that the conditions in the United States that made the the Senate bill plausible faded away in the decades that followed and have not returned. The United States no longer has a Protestant government, and the return of such would not be a natural extension of the current scene. So the expectation that the exact scenario of Great Controversy would be re-enacted in today's world is unlikely. The constant expectation of a national Sunday law in the US Congress leads to speculation and conspiracy theories rather than sound biblical and historical study.

Sunday laws in our future remain, however, a viable reading of Revelation 13 and certainly of Great Controversy. But they may well come from a surprising direction. As an example of the possibilities I referenced Clifford Goldstein, who offers a path to international Sunday laws that would make sense in today's world. All the world religions anticipate some future figure that will dramatically impact the course of history. For the Christians, his name is Jesus. For the Jews, he is the Messiah. For the Muslims, he is the Mahdi (although many Muslims also anticipate a major role for Jesus). For the Hindus, he is Kalki. For the Buddhists, he is Matriya. Second Thessalonians (2:8-10) and Revelation (13:13-14; 16:13-14) anticipate a great end-time deception in which Satan impersonates Christ before the world (GC affirms this idea). His dazzling, end-time appearance could evoke the hopes and dreams of people of all faiths. Seizing upon these expectations, Satan could call the world to worship God on Sunday as a sign of loyalty to Jesus/Messiah/Mahdi/Kalki/Matriya and the highest hopes of their faiths. Such an outcome would fulfill Great Controversy and Revelation 13, but in an unexpected way, something fulfilled prophecy in the Bible would lead us to expect.

My concern is that by focusing on a prediction that seems to specific and measurable as a national Sunday law in Congress, we could distract ourselves from the real thing when it happens. We need hearts that are open to revelation and open to the Holy Spirit as we navigate

the challenging waters ahead. The desire for certainty causes us to focus on specific details rather than on understanding the larger picture of prophecy. That understanding is difficult work, but it will keep us safe in the perplexing times ahead of us. Prophecy was not given to satisfy our curiosity about the future, it was given to prepare our hearts to meet the one that we worship and adore. I suggest we prioritize that task.