Adventists who want the church to compromise with Darwinism typically minimize the implications of their beliefs for the Church. But any compromise with Darwinism would strip the Seventh-day Adventist Church of its signature doctrine, the key to its prophetic interpretation, and its founding prophet.

This church takes the first part of its name from the fourth commandment, the biblical rationale for which is “in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.” God audibly spoke the Ten Commandments within the hearing of the entire congregation of Israel (Ex. 20:1-21; Deut. 4:10-13). God Himself inscribed the Ten Commandments on stone tablets, twice (Ex. 31:18; 34:1, 28; Deut. 4:13; 10:1-4). The tablets were placed inside the Ark of the Testimony (Ex. 34:29; 40:20; Deut. 10:5), the most sacred article of furniture in the sanctuary, above which was seen the visible manifestation of God’s presence.
The Biblical rationale for the Sabbath commandment—that God created the earth in six days and rested on the Sabbath day—could not be clearer. This rationale cannot be accommodated to Darwinism, which posits that life on earth evolved from a single-celled organism over the course of hundreds of millions of years. Darwinism vitiates the biblical rationale for the Sabbath.

Seventh-day Darwinians (Cliff Goldstein’s moniker for Adventists who hold a Darwinian view of origins) typically respond by noting that the iteration of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5:1-21 does not include the creation rationale, but urges the Israelites to keep the Sabbath because they had been delivered from slavery in Egypt. But this is not the version of the Ten Commandments audibly spoken by God and inscribed by God’s own finger. In Deuteronomy 5, Moses is speaking to the Israelites, using covenant language that applies only to those people who were brought out of Egypt and were about to be led into Canaan, the land promised to their ancestor, Abraham. The rationale of deliverance from slavery in Egypt applies only to the Israelites as a nation, not to all of humanity.

Seventh-day Darwinians also point to the fact that modern Jews, such as Abraham Joshua Heschel, are Sabbath-keepers yet do not read Genesis one as being literally true. But Sabbath keeping is an essential characteristic of Jews and Judaism; it is an ethnic and religious identifier, and, for a Jew, needs no more rationale than that. By contrast, the Seventh-day Adventist Church calls everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, to return to the true Sabbath, regardless of culture or ethnicity. An ethnic or cultural identifier cannot support our mission. Our universal appeal to keep the Fourth Commandment demands a universal rationale, and only Genesis 2:2-3 and Exodus 20:11 provide that universal rationale.

The Sabbath doctrine is also central to the Adventist Church’s interpretation of prophecy. After the disappointment of 1844, when the early Adventists realized that the cleansing of the sanctuary of Daniel 8:14 did not refer to Christ’s second coming to earth, they learned that there was an earthly sanctuary and a heavenly sanctuary. Moses was instructed to carefully follow the pattern shown him (Ex. 25:9, 40; 26:30; Acts 7:44) because the sanctuary he was building would be a representation of a sanctuary in heaven. (Heb. 8:5; 9:11, 23-24)

Revelation tells us that when “the time had come for judging the dead . . . then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant.” (Rev. 11:18-19) In the earthly sanctuary, the Ark of the Covenant was in the Most Holy Place, which was opened only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16; Heb. 9:7). So in Revelation 11, when the time had come for judging the dead, it was the Most Holy Place of the heavenly temple that was opened. The early Adventists thus realized that a heavenly judgment of the dead had been typified, pre-figured, or foreshadowed by the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.

The Hebrew word Kippur comes from a root that means “to cover or hide”; a secondary meaning is “to obliterate or expiate.” So, in the judgment in Heaven typified by Yom Kippur, the sins of the sinner who has placed his faith in Christ are covered and hidden by Christ’s righteousness (Psalm 32:1-2; 85:2), expiated by Christ’s sacrifice, and will be forever obliterated. The determination of whose sins are covered and expiated by the blood of Christ is a process of investigation and of judgment.

When the early Adventists saw there was Ark containing the Ten Commandment law in both the earthly and the heavenly sanctuaries, their attention was drawn to the continuing force and validity of the Fourth Commandment. The investigative judgment and the Sabbath became the twin pillars of the Adventist movement, and this new light was the key to interpreting the Three Angels’ Messages of Revelation 14. The First Angel’s message, “Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” refers to both (1) our warning that the investigative judgment in Heaven has begun, and (2) our call to worship the Creator God on the biblical, Seventh-day Sabbath, which is God’s sign and seal as our
Creator. The “mark of the beast” in the Third Angel’s message refers to the keeping of the false sabbath established by the beast power, Sunday, in place of the true Sabbath established by God at the creation. In short, our interpretation of prophecy is entirely bound up in the continuing validity of the Fourth Commandment, with its rationale that God created the world in six days.

There is also the issue of Adventism’s founding prophet, Ellen White, who received some 2000 visions during the course of her prophetic career. As was demonstrated many times, these visions were supernatural occurrences; she did not breathe while in vision, and she possessed supernatural strength. She claimed to have been carried back in vision to the creation week, and to have been shown that it was a week just like every week since:

I was then carried back to the creation and was shown that the first week, in which God performed the work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh day, was just like every other week. The great God in his days of creation and day of rest, measured off the first cycle as a sample for successive weeks till the close of time. Spiritual Gifts, vol. 3, p. 90.

Seventh-day Darwinians typically shrug their shoulders and say, “Well, she made a mistake. She wasn’t inerrant.” But what was she mistaken about? Was Ellen White mistaken about what she was shown in vision? If so, how could she ever be trusted about anything she was shown in vision? Assuming that God was not wrong about how long the creation took, was Ellen White mistaken in believing that God was the source of her visions? If God was not the source of these manifestly supernatural occurrences, what power was?

In any “mistake” scenario, Ellen White’s prophetic authority is gravely impeached. To say that Ellen White was mistaken on this issue is tantamount to saying that the Adventist Church never really had a prophet.