Title: The interpretation of the negative particle נא : an exegetical study of the prohibition "thou shalt not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day" (Exodus 35:3)

Author: Milton Thorman Pardosi

Date completed: October 2005

Granting Institution: Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS)

Description: Unpublished Thesis (MA): 205pages

Abstract:

The prohibition “Thou shalt not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day” (Exod 35:3) has been debated among those who observe the Sabbath day. Jews and Samaritans have interpreted it as a permanent prohibition for the Sabbath itself is a permanent law. But, Jews are divided into two views. The first view does not allow Jews to kindle and keep a fire burning continually on the Sabbath day. The second view allows Jews to have a fire on the Sabbath, but the fire itself cannot be kindled, refueled or extinguished during the Sabbath hours. The Samaritans do not allow their members to kindle and keep a fire burning on the Sabbath day.

Some Christian scholars have interpreted it as a temporary prohibition and relate it to the time of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness for forty years. According to other scholars, however, a prohibition that used נא as its negative particle must be considered permanent. Other scholars relate it to the construction of the Tabernacle and its equipment. In this view, it seems that this prohibition was valid less than one year. Others relate it to pagan worship. It is originally directed against cultic practices with fire kindled in worship of foreign Gods. The texts that are quoted in support of this view, however, are out of context. The main question of the study is about the nature of the negative particle נא in the structure: נא + Imperfect. The main purpose of the study is to investigate the nature of the negative particle נא in the structure: נא + Imperfect.

This study resulted to three findings. First, all the verbs in the imperfect form(s), whether Simple Present-Future or Simple Present-Future Positive Command, according to the verb and its context, might be classified into three categories of action: momentary, temporary, and
permanent actions. Second, the negative particle א in the imperfect form(s), whether Simple Present-Future Negative or Simple Present-Future Negative Command, is only negation of the action indicated by the verbs. It does not function as a sign that the action of the verb in the imperfect form(s) is a permanent action. This is because the time action of the verb in the imperfect form(s) is determined not by the use of the negative particle א, but by the verb and its context. Third, the prohibition in Exod 35:3, according to the verb and its context, could be considered temporary though it used א as its negative particle. It might be proven from some other prohibitions in the Pentateuch which used א as their negative particle but actually they are temporary prohibitions for they are bound with such situations and conditions. When the situations or conditions changed, they might no longer be valid, or might be slightly different in their implementations in the future. Yet, the principles of the Sabbath itself through this prohibition, that the Sabbath is a holy day and a day of rest, still binds those who observe the Sabbath day.