The Arabic particle *lan*

Scholars have been divided over the exact signification of the Arabic subjunctive particle *lan* in classical Arabic. Three similar meanings have been assigned to it, but it should be clear that scholars unanimously believe *lan* can signify only one of the three; no one holds it to have two or all three meanings. I believe the more likely signification of *lan* was the negative future devoid of any emphasis or perpetuity. In order to substantiate my claim I intend to use three methods. One is to argue using linguistic principles that *lan* should, by default, be taken to indicate the simple negative future (simple in the sense of being devoid of any other meaning). The second and the one that will by far take up the bulk of this paper is to observe all the occurrences of *lan* in the Qur’an. The context of each occurrence should shed light on the author’s intended meaning. More specifically, its occurrence together with words that convey emphasis or perpetuity should militate against *lan*’s conveying those meanings, for then the former words would be superfluous. This is the main way I wish to prove that the evidence is qualitatively stronger in favor of my preferred meaning. However, I will use other principles to show that the evidence also quantitatively preponderates against the other two meanings. The third method I intend to employ is to look at the hadith corpus for occurrences of *lan*.

As previously mentioned, no scholar holds *lan* to have more than one meaning; all scholars agree it is monosemous. The bone of contention is *which* meaning it conveys, and scholars have three different opinions in this regard. Some hold it to convey only the negative future, others believe it signifies the negative future together with emphasis, while the rest hold it to mean the perpetual negative future. Thus, according to these opinions, the sentence
in classical Arabic would mean “I will not go.”, “I certainly will not go.”, or “I will never go.” respectively.

It is clear why no scholar has ever proposed that لَن could have two (or all three) meanings depending on context. The reason is simple: when two meanings are similar, the context will almost never suffice to distinguish them. Since the meanings proposed for لَن overlap greatly, it follows that Arabic speakers would not have been able to tell which of the meanings was intended. Furthermore, two meanings that are closely related are likely to collapse into one within a generation or two.

When attempting to ascertain the signification of a word in a dead language, it is clear that one cannot reach a definitive conclusion. There will always be a degree of uncertainty and thus room for disagreement. With that caveat in mind, we can spell out some rules of thumb for deciding what contexts will weigh in favor of or against a meaning.

The linguistic principle alluded to in the introduction is that it stands to reason that positive statements will have their exact negative counterparts. Thus, we have the positive past, e.g. ذَهَب “He went.” and its negative counterpart مَذَهَب “He did not go.” Similarly, we have the positive present-future, e.g. ذَهَب “He goes/will go.” and its negative counterpart لَا ذَهَب “He does not/will not go.” Furthermore, we have the positive modus energiticus I, e.g. لِذَهَب “He will assuredly go.” and its negative counterpart لَا لِذَهَب “He will assuredly not go.” We also have the positive modus energiticus II, e.g. لِذَهَب “He will assuredly go.” and its negative counterpart لَا لِذَهَب “He will assuredly not go.” Finally, we have the future tense, e.g. ذِيْنَذَهَب “He will go.”. It stands to reason it should have its exact negative counterpart. The only available option is, of course, لَا لِذَهَب.

Turning to the Qur’an, the first principle I intend to use is that when the future is discussed in the vicinity of a conditional sentence or just the protasis, it is more likely to be the simple future, i.e. devoid of perpetuity. The reason is that, by default, a protasis or “if-clause” refers to a specific point in time. Therefore, it makes more sense for there to be no perpetuity
in نَ لُ، for otherwise it would not be referring to a specific point in the future. Thus, starting from the beginning of the Qur’an, we have the following verses:

وَإِنْ كَتَنَّكُمْ فِي رَبِّ مَعَا نُرْنَّنا عَلَىٰ عِبَادِنَا فَلْأَفْلُوا بِسَوْرَةٍ مِّنْ مَلِكِهِ وَأذِنَّوا شَهِىَءًا مَّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنِّنَا صَانِقُونَ. فَإِنَّ لَمْ تَفَعَّلُوا وَلَا دَأَرَ فَلْأَفْلُوا الْنَّارُ الَّذِي وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحَجَّارَةُۡ أَعْمَتَتْ لِلَّكَافِرِينَ

Translation: And if you are in doubt about what We have sent down upon Our Servant [Muhammad], then produce a surah the like thereof and call upon your witnesses other than Allah, if you should be truthful. But if you do not - and you will not be able to - then fear the Fire, whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for the disbelievers.¹

أن يَسْتَنْكَفُ النَّسِيَّةُ أَنْ يَكُونُ عِبَادُ اللَّهِ وَلَا الْمَلَائِكَةُ المَقْرُونُونَۡ وَمَنْ يَسْتَنْكَفُ عَنْ عُبَادَتِهِ وَيَسْتَكْبِرُ فِينَخَشَرْهُمْ إِلَيْهِ

جَمِيعًا 4:172

Translation: The Messiah would not disdain to be a servant of Allah, nor would the angels near [to Him]. And whoever disdains His worship and is arrogant - He will gather them to Himself all together.

فَلَنْ يَنْفَعَكُمُ الْفَزِيرُ إِنْ فَزَرْتُمْ مِنَ الْمَوْتِ أَوَّلَ مَاتٍۡ أَلْلَهَ

33:16

Translation: Say, [O Muhammad], "Fleeing will not benefit you if you should flee from death or killing; and then [if you did], you would not be given enjoyment [of life] except for a little."

سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَسْتَغْفَرُوا لَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ يُسْتَغْفَرُ لَهُمْ لَنَ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ

63:6

¹ All translations of the Qur’an are taken from Sahih International, albeit some with slight modifications.
Translation: It is all the same for them whether you ask forgiveness for them or do not ask forgiveness for them; Allah will not forgive them. Indeed, Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people.

وَلَن يُؤْذِرَ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِذَا جَاءَ أَحْلَهَا وَلَاتَّخِذَهَا بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ۖ 63:11

Translation: But Allah will not delay a soul when its time has come. And Allah is Acquainted with what you do.

زُعمَ الْذِّنِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنْ لَا يُبْعَثُوا فَلِنْ تَؤْمِنُنَا وَزُبَّنَا لَنْ نَتَّبِعِنَّمُۖ ثُمَّ نَتَّبِعَنَّ بِمَا عَمِلْنَاهُمْ ۖ 64:7

Translation: Those who disbelieve have claimed that they will not be resurrected. Say, "Yes, by my Lord, you will surely be resurrected; then you will surely be informed of what you did. And that, for Allah, is easy."

It is extremely unlikely for an assertion to be made using the perpetual future that is then limited temporally, for the perpetuity mentioned initially would serve no purpose. Thus, we have the following verses:

وَإِذْ قَلَّتُمْ ۖ إِنَّمَا مَوْسِئُنَا لَنَّوْمَنَّكُمْ حَتَّى نَرَى اللَّهَ جَهَّزَهُ فَأَخْذَتْهُمُ الصَّعْابَةُ وَأَنْتُمْ تَتَنَّطُورُونَ ۖ 2:55

Translation: And [recall] when you said, "O Moses, we will not believe you until we see Allah outright"; so the thunderbolt took you while you were looking on.

وَقَالُوا لَنَنْسَى النَّارُ إِلَّا أَيُّهَا مُعَلُّودَةُ ۖ فَأَخْذَتْهُمُ ۖ عِندَ اللَّهِ عَهْدُهَا فَلَنْ يُجَلَّفَ اللَّهُ عَهْدَهَا ۖ 2:80

Translation: And they say, "The Fire will not touch us, except for a few days." Say, "Have you taken a covenant with Allah? For Allah will never break His covenant. Or do you say about Allah that which you do not know?"
وَلَنِ تَرَضَى عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلَا الْمُسْلِمُونَ حَتَّى تَتَّبِعُوا مِّلَّتَهُمْ

Translation: And the Jews or the Christians will not approve of you until you follow
their religion. Say, "Indeed, the guidance of Allah is the [only] guidance." If you were to
follow their desires after what has come to you of knowledge, you would have against Allah
no protector or helper.

ذَلِكَ بِأَلْهَمِ قَالَوْا لَنَ تَسْتَنَدُ النَّارُ إِلَّا أَيَّامًا مُّدَّتَهَا ۳:۲۴

Translation: That is because they say, "The Fire will not touch us except for [a few]
numbered days," and [because] they were deluded in their religion by what they were
inventing.

۵:۲۴ ۹۲

Translation: You will not attain the good [reward] until you spend [in the way of
Allah] from that which you love. And whatever you spend - indeed, Allah is Knowing of it.

۵:۲۲

Translation: They said, "O Moses, indeed within it is a people of tyrannical strength,
and indeed, we will not enter it until they leave it; but if they leave it, then we will enter."

۵:۲۴

Translation: They said, "O Moses, indeed we will not enter it, ever, as long as they are
within it; so go, you and your Lord, and fight. Indeed, we are remaining right here."

۶:۱۲۴

Translation: And so when they met on a small day what they had made for themselves;
they were struck with a great punishment.
Translation: And when a sign comes to them, they say, "We will not believe until we are given like that which was given to the messengers of Allah." Allah is most knowing of where He places His message. There will afflict those who committed crimes debasement before Allah and severe punishment for what they used to conspire.

١٢:٦٦

Translation: [Jacob] said, "I will not send him with you until you give me a promise by Allah that you will bring him [back] to me, unless you should be surrounded by enemies." And when they had given their promise, he said, "Allah, over what we say, is Witness."

١٢:٨٠

Translation: So when they had despaired of him, they secluded themselves in private consultation. The eldest of them said, "Do you not know that your father has taken upon you an oath by Allah and [that] before you failed in [your duty to] Joseph? So I will never leave [this] land until my father permits me or Allah decides for me, and He is the best of judges.

١٧:٩٠

Translation: And they say, "We will not believe you until you break open for us from the ground a spring.

١٧:٩٣
Translation: Or you have a house of gold or you ascend into the sky. And [even then], we will not believe in your ascension until you bring down to us a book we may read." Say, "Exalted is my Lord! Was I ever but a human messenger?"

Translation: So eat and drink and be contented. And if you see from among humanity anyone, say, 'Indeed, I have vowed to the Most Merciful abstention, so I will not speak today to [any] man.' "

Translation: They said, "We will never cease being devoted to the calf until Moses returns to us."

Translation: And it will not benefit you that Day, when you have wronged, that you are [all] sharing in the punishment.

If أدبأ is being used with a verb, لن is most unlikely to contain the sememe of perpetuity, since أدبأ already signifies it. Thus, we have the following verses.

Translation: But they will not wish for it, ever, because of what their hands have put forth. And Allah is Knowing of the wrongdoers.
Translation: If Allah should return you to a faction of them [after the expedition] and then they ask your permission to go out [to battle], say, "You will not go out with me, ever, and you will never fight with me an enemy. Indeed, you were satisfied with sitting [at home] the first time, so sit [now] with those who stay behind."

Translation: Indeed, if they come to know of you, they will stone you or return you to their religion. And you would not succeed, then - ever."

Translation: And who is more unjust than one who is reminded of the verses of his Lord but turns away from them and forgets what his hands have put forth? Indeed, We have placed over their hearts coverings, lest they understand it, and in their ears deafness. And if you invite them to guidance - they will not be guided, then - ever.

Translation: But you thought that the Messenger and the believers would not return to their families, ever, and that was made pleasing in your hearts. And you assumed an assumption of evil and became a people ruined."
Analogously to what was just mentioned, if a verse contains a word emphasizing the negation of the verb, it is most unlikely لَنَ would contain the meaning of emphasis. Thus, we have

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْتَغْنَى عَلَيْهِمْ أَمَوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أُلَادَهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَأَوْلَٰكَ هُمْ وَقُودُ الْذَّٰلِكَ ۢاۡلَٰلَّٰلِ.

Translation: Indeed, those who disbelieve - never will their wealth or their children avail them against Allah at all. And it is they who are fuel for the Fire.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَمَاتَوْهُمْ وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ فَلَنْ يَقْتُلَنَّ مِنْ أَحَدِهِمْ مَنْ زَيْنَثَ اللَّهُ وَلَوْ أَفْتَقَنَّهُ وَأُولَٰكَ لِلَّهِ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ ۢاۡلَٰلِ.

Translation: Indeed, those who disbelieve and die while they are disbelievers - the [whole] capacity of the earth in gold would not be accepted from one of them if he would [seek to] ransom himself with it. For those there will be a painful punishment, and they will have no helpers.

وَمَا مُحَدَّثَ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ فَذُٰلِكَ خُلُقُهُ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرَّسُولُ ؟ أَفَإِنْ مَاتَ أُوْلُٰهُ وَأَوْلُٰدُهُ وَأُولُٰكَ أَصْحَابُ الْذَّٰلِكَ ؟ هُمْ فِيهِ خَالِدُونَ ِۢلَٰلِ.

Translation: Indeed, those who disbelieve - their wealth or their children will not avail them against Allah at all, and those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally.

يَضُرُّ اللَّهُ شَيْئًا وَسَيْتَجْزَى اللَّهُ الشَاكِرِينَ ۢاۡلَٰلِ.

Translation: Muhammad is not but a messenger. [Other] messengers have passed on before him. So if he was to die or be killed, would you turn back on your heels [to unbelief]?

And he who turns back on his heels will not harm Allah at all; but Allah will reward the grateful.
And do not be grieved, [O Muhammad], by those who hasten into disbelief. Indeed, they will not harm Allah at all. Allah intends that He should give them no share in the Hereafter, and for them is a great punishment.

Translation: And do not be grieved, [O Muhammad], by those who hasten into disbelief. Indeed, they will not harm Allah at all. Allah intends that He should give them no share in the Hereafter, and for them is a great punishment.

Translation: Indeed, those who purchase disbelief [in exchange] for faith - they will not harm Allah at all, and for them is a painful punishment.

Translation: O Messenger, let them not grieve you who hasten into disbelief of those who say, "We believe" with their mouths, but their hearts believe not, and from among the Jews. [They are] avid listeners to falsehood, listening to another people who have not come to you. They distort words beyond their [proper] usages, saying "If you are given this, take it; but if you are not given it, then beware." But he for whom Allah intends fitnah - never will you possess [power to do] for him a thing against Allah. Those are the ones for whom Allah does not intend to purify their hearts. For them in this world is disgrace, and for them in the Hereafter is a great punishment.

Translation: O Messenger, let them not grieve you who hasten into disbelief of those who say, "We believe" with their mouths, but their hearts believe not, and from among the Jews. [They are] avid listeners to falsehood, listening to another people who have not come to you. They distort words beyond their [proper] usages, saying "If you are given this, take it; but if you are not given it, then beware." But he for whom Allah intends fitnah - never will you possess [power to do] for him a thing against Allah. Those are the ones for whom Allah does not intend to purify their hearts. For them in this world is disgrace, and for them in the Hereafter is a great punishment.
Those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally.
Some have argued that if a verse contains emphasis, لَنْ is not likely to contain perpetuity, as the two do not seem to make a good pair. Thus, they quote

إِنَّ الْكُفَّارَ وَمَالِكَ وَهُمْ كَفَافَ فَلَن يَفْقِرُ مِنْ أَحَدِهِمْ مِنْ الأَرْضِ ذَهْبًا وَلَوْ أُفْتِدَى بِهِ أَوْلُكْ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرٍ 3:91

Translation: Indeed, those who disbelieve and die while they are disbelievers - the [whole] capacity of the earth in gold would not be accepted from one of them if he would [seek to] ransom himself with it. For those there will be a painful punishment, and they will have no helpers.

Here the non-acceptance from the disbelievers of all the gold in the world is a way of emphasizing that nothing will be accepted from them once they have died in a state of disbelief and entered the next life. However, emphasis does not seem incompatible with perpetuity, so the mere existence of emphasis in a statement does not seem to preclude the meaning of perpetuity. Thus, it does not sound strange in English to say, “I will certainly never go.”, where “certainly” conveys emphasis. So, this argument in favor of our preferred meaning does not seem strong. However, this verse can still be adduced in conjunction with another principle, as we shall see below.

In some rhetorical questions لَنْ makes far more sense if it is simply taken to mean the negative future, for the rhetorical question will essentially be stating the positive future. Thus, we have

إِذْ نَفَّذُ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَلْنَ يَكْفُكُمْ أَنْ يَمْكُمْ رَكُنَّ بِثَلاَثَةِ الْأَلَافِ مِنْ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مَنْزِلٌ 3:124

Translation: [Remember] when you said to the believers, "Is it not sufficient for you that your Lord should reinforce you with three thousand angels sent down?"
In some contexts it is clear the negation refers not to the future for all time to come but to a specific point.

وما مَحَمَّدًا إِلاً رَسُولُ فَذَٰلَكَ خَلَتْ مِن قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ؟ إِفَانَ مَاتُ أوْ فَلَنَّ الْفَطَرَ عَلَى أَعْفَاكُمْ؟ وَمَن يَتَّخِذِّبْ عَلَى عِبَادَتِهِ فَلَنَّ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ مَوَارِثَهُمُ. 3:144

Translation: Muhammad is not but a messenger. [Other] messengers have passed on before him. So if he was to die or be killed, would you turn back on your heels [to unbelief]?

And he who turns back on his heels will not harm Allah at all; but Allah will reward the grateful.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ مُوسَى لِمِيقَانِي وَكَلَِّمَهُ رَبُّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ أَنْزُلْ إِلَيْكَ قَالَ لَنَ ثَرَبَيْنِ لَكَ وَلَكِنْ أَنْزُلَ إِلَيْكَ إِلَى الْجِبَلِ فَإِنَّ الْجِبَلَ يَسِيرُ مَكَانَةً فَسَوْفُ تُرْبِيَ فَلَمَّا تَحْلَّيْنَى رَبِّي الْجِبَلَ جَعَلَهُ نِعْمَةً وَلَبَنَتِ مُوسَى صَعْفَا فَلَمَّا أَقْفَاقَ قَالَ سَتَحَلَّكَ نِعْمَةٌ وَلَبَنَتِ مُوسَى أَوْلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ 7:143

Translation: And when Moses arrived at Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said, "My Lord, show me [Yourself] that I may look at You." [Allah] said, "You will not see Me, but look at the mountain; if it should remain in place, then you will see Me." But when his Lord appeared to the mountain, He rendered it level, and Moses fell unconscious.

And when he awoke, he said, "Exalted are You! I have repented to You, and I am the first of the believers."

فَلَنَّ أَنْفَغَوَّا طَوِئًا أوْ كَرَّ هَا لَنْ يَتَّخِذَ مَنْ كُنْتُمْ مَنْكَمْ إِنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ قُوَّامًا فَاسِقِينَ 9:53

Translation: Say, "Spend willingly or unwillingly; it will not be accepted from you. Indeed, you have been a defiantly disobedient people."
And do not walk upon the earth exultantly. Indeed, you will not tear the earth [apart], and you will not reach the mountains in height.

Translation: And do not walk upon the earth exultantly. Indeed, you will not tear the earth [apart], and you will not reach the mountains in height.
إِنَّهُمْ إِنْ يُظْهِرُوا عَلَيكَمْ يُزِيدُوكُمْ أَوْ يُبِيدُوكُمْ فِي مَلَّتِهِمْ وَلَنْ نُنَخَّلْهُمْ إِذَا أُداَءُوا أَبَدًا 18:20

Translation: Indeed, if they come to know of you, they will stone you or return you to their religion. And you would not succeed, then - ever."

أَوْ يُصِنِّحُ مَاؤُهَا غَزْوَةً فَلَنْ تَسْتَطِيعُ لَهَا طَلَّبًا 18:41

Translation: Or its water will become sunken [into the earth], so you would not be able to seek it."

فَالَّذِي لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعُ مَعِيْ صَبْرًا 18:67

Translation: He said, "Indeed, with me you will never be able to have patience."

فَالَّذِي أَلَّمْ أَقُلْ لِلَّذِي لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعُ مَعِيْ صَبْرًا 18:72

Translation: [Al-Khadhir] said, "Did I not say that with me you would not be able to have patience?"

فَالَّذِي أَلَّمْ أَقُلْ لِلَّذِي لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعُ مَعِيْ صَبْرًا 18:75

Translation: [Al-Khadhir] said, "Did I not tell you that with me you would not be able to have patience?"

فَفَلَأَهْبُ لَقَدْ قَالَ لَكِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ أَنْ تَفْوَنِ الْيَوْمَ إِنَّ لَكَ مَوْعِدًا آنَّ لِيْلَةَ الْيَوْمِ تَتَّلُى عَلَيْهِ عَالِمًا لَّا يَتَّخَذُهُ عَالِمًا 20:97

Translation: [Moses] said, "Then go. And indeed, it is [decreed] for you in [this] life to say, 'No contact.' And indeed, you have an appointment [in the Hereafter] you will not fail to keep. And look at your 'god' to which you remained devoted. We will surely burn it and blow it into the sea with a blast."
Their meat will not reach Allah, nor will their blood, but what reaches Him is piety from you. Thus have We subjected them to you that you may glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you; and give good tidings to the doers of good.

Those who remained behind will say when you set out toward the war booty to take it, "Let us follow you." They wish to change the words of Allah. Say, "You will not follow us. Thus did Allah say before." So they will say, "Rather, you envy us." But [in fact] they were not understanding except a little.

When contrasted with a positive future, it is more likely that [which] indicates merely the negative future. Thus, we see

Indeed, your Lord knows, [O Muḥammad], that you stand [in prayer] almost two thirds of the night or half of it or a third of it, and [so do] a group of those with
you. And Allah determines [the extent of] the night and the day. He has known that you
[Muslims] will not be able to do it and has turned to you in forgiveness, so recite what is easy
[for you] of the Qur'an. He has known that there will be among you those who are ill and
others traveling throughout the land seeking [something] of the bounty of Allah and others
fighting for the cause of Allah. So recite what is easy from it and establish prayer and give
zakah and loan Allah a goodly loan. And whatever good you put forward for yourselves - you
will find it with Allah. It is better and greater in reward. And seek forgiveness of Allah.
Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.

Some verbs that have a negative meaning are always constructed with the negative,
and therefore end up giving a positive meaning. In such cases it is more likely for ﻷن to simply
negate the future, because the end result is a simple positive future, devoid of any other
meaning. Indeed, it is hard to imagine what the other two meanings of ﻷن would result in here.

قَالُوْاْ ﻷن نَبُرَحُ عَلَيْهِ عَكَفَيْنَ هَكَذَا يُرِجُعُ إِلَيْنَا مُوسَىُّ ٢٠:٩١

Translation: They said, "We will continue being devoted to the calf until Moses
returns to us."

إِنَّ الْذِّنَينَ كَفَرُواْ وَصَدَّواْ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَشَفَافُوا الْرَّسُولَ ﻓَعِندَ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الْهَدْيَ أَن يَضْرِءُواْ اللَّهَ شَيْئًا وَسَيُخْطَطُ ﺎَنَّ أَعْمَالَهُمْ ٤٧:٣٢

Translation: Indeed, those who disbelieved and averted [people] from the path of
Allah and opposed the Messenger after guidance had become clear to them - they will not
harm Allah at all, and He will render worthless their deeds.

In order to restrict the positive meaning of a verb, Arabic employs four methods, one
of which is to use the negated verb followed by a word denoting exception followed by what
the verb is being restricted to. If the negation contained in the negated verb has neither emphasis nor perpetuity, it is clear that the basic meaning of the verb is what is being predicated of the restricted word. However, if the negation contains the additional sememe of emphasis or perpetuity, it is not clear if this meaning, together with the positive verb, is to be predicated of the word being restricted. Thus, we have

وَفَرَّوْا لَن يَخْلَفُوا الْجَلَّةِ إِلَّا مِنْ كَانَ هُوُا أَوْ نُصْرِئُهُ وَكُلُّ أَمَاتِي هُمُّ فَلَمَّا هَاتَوْا بِرَأْيَاهُمْ إِنَّ كُتُبَ الْمَعَافِينَ 2:111

Translation: And they say, "None will enter Paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian." That is [merely] their wishful thinking, Say, "Produce your proof, if you should be truthful."

أَن يَضْرُوْكُمْ إِلَّا أَذىٌ وَإِنْ يُقَذِّفُوكُمْ يُؤْلُوكُمْ الأَذْىَ ثُمَّ لا يُصْرُوْنَ 3:111

Translation: They will not harm you except for [some] annoyance. And if they fight you, they will show you their backs; then they will not be aided.

قَلْ أَن يُصِيبَنَا إِلَّا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَنَا وَأَيْنَ كَانَ الْقَاتِلُوْكُمُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ 9:51

Translation: Say, "We will not be struck except by what Allah has decreed for us; He is our protector." And upon Allah let the believers rely.

وَأُوجِي إِلَى نَوْحٍ أَنْ لَنْ يَوْمَنَ مِنْ فُؤَاكَمَ إِلَّا مِنْ قَدْ أَنَّ أَمَنَ فَلَا بَتِّيْنَ بِمَا كَانَ يَفْعَلُونَ 11:36

Translation: And it was revealed to Noah that, "No one will believe from your people except those who have already believed, so do not be distressed by what they have been doing.

فَلُوْفُوا فَلَنْ نَزِيدُكُمْ إِلَّا عَذَابًا 78:30

Translation: "So taste [the penalty], and We will not increase you except in torment."
Using Ockham's razor, it is reasonable to assume that, unless proven otherwise, one morpheme has one sememe. Therefore, unless proven otherwise, لَن should be assumed to only negate the future. One may argue that even this signification comprises two sememes, namely negation and futurity. Be that as it may, the other two opinions are even worse in this regard, for they comprise three sememes each: the two just mentioned and either emphasis or perpetuity. So, the plain negative future is the simplest signification and therefore the one we should assume by default. Based on Ockham’s razor one may be tempted to venture a fourth opinion, namely that لَن indicates only negation or only futurity, but the language already contains morphemes that correspond to the negation sememe and futurity sememe respectively. It should therefore come as no surprise that there is a separate morpheme that is composed of these two sememes.

With the aforementioned principle in mind we turn to the Qur'an to see if, among the verses left over, there are any that do not admit of our preferred meaning. It bears repetition that even if one of the other two meanings fits, the former would be preferred by virtue of the principle explained above.

وإِذْ قَلَّنَا لَا مُوسىَّ لَن تَصْبِرَ عَلَى طَغَامٍ وَاحٍ فَأَفْدَعُ لَنَا زَلُّكَ بِيَرْجَ لَنَا مَا ثَبِيتُ الأَزْمَنَ مِن بَيْنِهَا وَقَتَانِهَا وَقُومُهَا وَعَدُّهَا وَمُصَلِّيْهَا قَالُوا أَنْتُمُ الْمَقْدُومُونَ الَّذِينَ هُوَ أَذُنُ بَلَدَيْ هُوَ خَيْرُ إِنَّا مَثَّلْتُما مَثْلَا وَمُصَلِّيْنَ عَلَيْهِمْ الْبَيْتُ وَالْمَسْكِنَةَ وَبَاغُوا بِغَضْبِ مَنَّ اللَّهِ ذَلِكْ بَلَدَيْهِمْ كَانُوا يَفْلَوُونَ بَابَاتَ اللَّهِ وَيَفْلَوُونَ الْبَيْتُينَ يَغْيِرُ الْحَقَّ ذَلِكْ بِمَا غَصَّوا وَكَانُوا يَغْتَنُونُ 2:61

Translation: And [recall] when you said, "O Moses, we will not be able to endure one [kind of] food. So call upon your Lord to bring forth for us from the earth its green herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions." [Moses] said, "Would you exchange what is better for what is less? Go into [any] settlement and indeed, you will have what you have asked." And they were covered with humiliation and poverty and returned with anger from
Allah [upon them]. That was because they [repeatedly] disbelieved in the signs of Allah and killed the prophets without right. That was because they disobeyed and were [habitually] transgressing.

وَقَالُوا لَنْ نَعْظَمَ الدَّارَ إِلَّا أَيْنَ أَيْنَ مَعْنًوَةً قَالُوا أَخْطَبُتمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَهْدًا فَلَنْ يَكُفُّلَ اللَّهُ عَهْدًا أَمْ تَفْوَلُونَ عَلَيْهِ مَا لَا

Translation: And they say, "The Fire will not touch us, except for a few days." Say, "Have you taken a covenant with Allah? For Allah will never break His covenant. Or do you say about Allah that which you do not know?"

In this verse it is the second instance of أن لن with which we are concerned.

وَمَن يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يَقْبِلَ مَنْ هَوَاءٌ وَهُوَ فِي الْإِحْرَازَةِ مِنَ النَّاسِ

Translation: And whoever desires other than Islam as religion - it will not be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ أَيْمَانِهِمْ لَمْ أَزَادُوا كَفْرًا أَنْ تَفْقَلَ تَوْبَتَهُمْ وَأُولَٰكَ هُمَّ الْخَاسِرُونَ

Translation: Indeed, those who reject the message after their belief and then increase in disbelief - their [claimed] repentance will not be accepted, and they are the ones astray.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَمَاتَوْا وَهُمْ كَفَارُ فَلَنْ يَقْبِلَ مِنْ أَحَدِهِمْ بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَى الأَرْضِ ذَهِبًا وَلَوْ أَفْتَقَدَ فِيهِ أَوْلَٰكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ وَمَا

Translation: Indeed, those who disbelieve and die while they are disbelievers - the [whole] capacity of the earth in gold would not be accepted from one of them if he would [seek to] ransom himself with it. For those there will be a painful punishment, and they will have no helpers.
أولئك الذين أكرمنهم الله ومن يُعْنِن الله فلن تجد له نصيرًا 4:52

Translation: Those are the ones whom Allah has cursed; and he whom Allah curses - you will not find for him a helper.

فَما لَكُمْ فِي المُنفَّقِينَ فَتَّنُوا وَلَا أَرْزَكُمْ وَلَا كَسَبْتُمْ فَأَنْتُونَ أَنْ تَهْنُوا مِنْ أَصِيلِ اللهِ وَمِنْ يُصَلِّل اللهُ فَلَن تَجِدَ لَهُ سَبِيلًا 4:88

Translation: What is [the matter] with you [that you are] two groups concerning the hypocrites, while Allah has made them fall back [into error and disbelief] for what they earned. Do you wish to guide those whom Allah has sent astray? And he whom Allah sends astray - you find will not for him a way [of guidance].

وَلَنَتَسْتَفِعَّوا أَنْ يَغْلِبُوا بَيْنَ الْسَّابِقِينَ وَلَا حُزَنْتُمْ فَلَا تَمِيلُوا كُلَّ الْمِلْكِ فَتَنْذِرُوهَا كَالمُعَلَّقَةِ وَإِنْ تَصَلَّخُوا وَتَفَقَّوْا فَإِنَّ اللهَ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا 4:129

Translation: And you will not be able to be equal [in feeling] between wives, even if you should strive [to do so]. So do not incline completely [toward one] and leave another hanging. And if you amend [your affairs] and fear Allah - then indeed, Allah is ever Forgiving and Merciful.

الْذِينِ يَتَرَبَّصُونَ بِكُلِّ فَلَنَّكَمْ فَتْحًا مَّنَ اللهِ فَلَنَّكَمْ مُعَكْمِن وَإِنْ كَانَ لِلَّكَافِرِينَ نَصُوبًا فَأَلْمَ نَسْتَخْرُدُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَنَنَعْمِحُكُمْ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فَاللهُ يُحَكِّمُ بَيْنَكُمْ بِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ وَلَا نَجِعُ اللهُ لِلَّكَافِرِينَ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ سَبِيلًا 4:141

Translation: Those who wait [and watch] you. Then if you gain a victory from Allah, they say, "Were we not with you?" But if the disbelievers have a success, they say [to them], "Did we not gain the advantage over you, but we protected you from the believers?" Allah will judge between [all of] you on the Day of Resurrection, and Allah will not give the disbelievers over the believers a way [to overcome them].
Translation: Wavering between them, [belonging] neither to the believers nor to the disbelievers. And whoever Allah leaves astray - you will not find for him a way.

إنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ فِي الْخَزَرَةِ الأَسْفَلَ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لَهُمْ نَصِيرًا 4:145

Translation: Indeed, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of the Fire - and will you not find for them a helper.

فَإِذَا رَجَعَ اللهُ إِلَيْهِمْ مَا كَفَرُوا بِهِ لِبَعْدِ مَا خَلَفَهُمْ أَنْ تَخْرَجُوا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا بَعْدِهِمْ مَا فَعَلُوا 9:83

Translation: If Allah should return you to a faction of them [after the expedition] and then they ask your permission to go out [to battle], say, "You will not go out with me, ever, and you will never fight with me an enemy. Indeed, you were satisfied with sitting [at home] the first time, so sit [now] with those who stay behind."

Here it is the second occurrence of لَنْ أَقُولُ لَكُمْ عِنْدَيْنِ خَزَارَانِ اللهُ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغِيبَ وَلَا أَقُولُ إِلَيْ مَلَكٍ وَلَا أَقُولُ إِلَى مَلَكِ الْأَمْرِ إِلَّا أَقْرَءْنَاهُمْ اللَّهُ خَيْرًا رُضِيَتْ بِهِ وَأَعْلَمْ بِهِ يَا إِبِي إِذَا أَلَمْ الطَّالِبِينَ 11:31

Translation: And I do not tell you that I have the depositories [containing the provision] of Allah or that I know the unseen, nor do I tell you that I am an angel, nor do I say of those upon whom your eyes look down that Allah will not grant them any good. Allah is most knowing of what is within their souls. Indeed, I would then be among the wrongdoers."

وَمَنْ يَبْدِي اللَّهُ فِي الْمُهَدِّدِ وَمَنْ يَصْبُحُ فَلَنْ تَجِدَ لَهُمْ نَجَارًا وَخَشَرَهُمْ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْقِبَاسِ عَلَى وُجُوهِهِمْ غَمِينَا وَلَكُمْ وَصْنَا مَا أَلْقَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ 17:97

Translation: And Allah will complete the threat to them; and whenever they come with faith to the faces of them, they believe not. And they are a company who have been turned back.
Translation: And whoever Allah guides - he is the [rightly] guided; and whoever He sends astray - you will not find for them protectors besides Him, and We will gather them on the Day of Resurrection [fallen] on their faces - blind, dumb and deaf. Their refuge is Hell; every time it subsides We increase them in blazing fire.

18:14

Translation: And We made firm their hearts when they stood up and said, "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Never will we invoke besides Him any deity. We would have certainly spoken, then, an excessive transgression.

18:17

Translation: And [had you been present], you would see the sun when it rose, inclining away from their cave on the right, and when it set, passing away from them on the left, while they were [laying] within an open space thereof. That was from the signs of Allah. He whom Allah guides is the [rightly] guided, but he whom He leaves astray - you will not find for him a protecting guide.

18:27

Translation: And recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord. There is no changer of His words, and you will not find in other than Him a refuge.

18:58
Translation: And your Lord is the Forgiving, full of mercy. If He were to impose blame upon them for what they earned, He would have hastened for them the punishment. Rather, for them is an appointment from which they will not find an escape.

سُلِّمْتُكَ عَلَىً مَا جَاهَزْتَ مِنَ الْبَيْنَاتِ وَالْذِّي فَطَرْنَا فَأَفْضِضْ مَا أَنتَ فَاسِقٌ إِنَّمَا يَقْضِي هَذِهِ الْخَيْرَةُ الْبَيْنَىَّ

20:72

Translation: They said, "We will not prefer you over what has come to us of clear proofs and [over] He who created us. So decree whatever you are to decree. You can only decree for this worldly life.

وَذَٰلِكَ الْيَوْمُ الَّذِي ذَهَبَ مَعْصِمًا فَذَٰلِكَ أَن لَّمْ تُقْدِرْ عَلَيْهِ فَنَادِى فِي الْعُلُمَاتِ أَن لَا إِلْهَ إِلَّا أَنتَ سَبِيعَانَكُ إِلَى كِتَابٍ مِّنَ الطَّالِبِينَ

21:87

Translation: And [mention] the man of the fish, when he went off in anger and thought that We would not decree [anything] upon him. And he called out within the darknesses, "There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers."

مِن كَان يَبْطَنْ أَن لَّمْ يَنْصَرَهُ اللَّهُ فِي الْذِّنَٰبِ وَالْآخِرَةِ فَلَمْ يَنْفَعَ بِهِ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ ثُمَّ يُلْقَعْ فَلَبِينَظُّ هَٰلِكُمْ كُلُّهُمَا مَا يُغْيِبُ

22:15

Translation: Whoever should think that Allah will not support [Prophet Muhammad] in this world and the Hereafter - let him extend a rope to the ceiling, then cut off [his breath], and let him see: will his effort remove that which enrages [him]?

وَيَسْتَجِلُّونَكَ بِالْعَذَابِ وَلَنْ يَخْلُفَ اللَّهُ وَعْدًا وَإِنْ يَوْمًا عَدَّ زَيْكَ كَأَلْفٍ سَنَةٍ مَّا تَعْدُونَ

22:47

Translation: And they urge you to hasten the punishment. But Allah will not fail in His promise. And indeed, a day with your Lord is like a thousand years of those which you count.
"If not for you, we would have been believers."

And if the fly should steal away from them a [tiny] thing, they could not recover it from him. Weak are the pursuer and pursued.

O people, an example is presented, so listen to it. Indeed, those you invoke besides Allah will not create [as much as] a fly, even if they gathered together for that purpose.

And if the fly should steal away from them a [tiny] thing, they could not recover it from him. Weak are the pursuer and pursued.

He said, "My Lord, for the favor You bestowed upon me, I will not be an assistant to the criminals."

This is the established way of Allah with those who passed on before; and you will not find in the way of Allah any change.

And those who disbelieve say, "We will not believe in this Qur'an nor in that before it." But if you could see when the wrongdoers are made to stand before their Lord, refuting each other's words... Those who were oppressed will say to those who were arrogant, "If not for you, we would have been believers."

Indeed, those who recite the Book of Allah and establish prayer and spend [in His cause] out of what We have provided them, secretly and publicly, [can] expect a profit that will not perish.
لستُنَّ الله قِبَلًا، فإن تجَّذب الله تحويلاً 35:43

Translation: [Due to] arrogance in the land and plotting of evil; but the evil plot does not encompass except its own people. Then do they await except the way of the former peoples? But you will not find in the way of Allah any change, and you will never find in the way of Allah any alteration.

ولقد جاءكم يُوصَف من قَبْلَ بِالْبَيْنَاتِ فَما زَلَّتمُ فِي شَأْنِ مَا جاءكم به، حَتَّى إِذَا هَذَا قَلْتُمُ لِيَنْبِعَ اللهُ مِن بَعْده

40:34

Translation: And Joseph had already come to you before with clear proofs, but you remained in doubt of that which he brought to you, until when he died, you said, 'Allah will not send a messenger after him.' Thus does Allah leave astray he who is a transgressor and skeptic."

فإِذَا قَلَّمُتمُ الْأَرْبَابَ قَضِرَّوا فِضْرَادَ الْرَّقَابِ حَتَّى إِذَا أَخَذْتُمُوهُمْ فَصُدُّوا الْوَتَّاقَ فَإِنَّمَا مِنْهُمْ بَعْضُهُمْ وَإِنَّمَا فَيْنِ الْمَزْمَرُ حَتَّى تَصْنِعُ أَلْحَزْبَ

47:4

Translation: So when you meet those who disbelieve [in battle], strike [their] necks until, when you have inflicted slaughter upon them, then secure their bonds, and either [confer] favor afterwards or ransom [them] until the war lays down its burdens. That [is the command]. And if Allah had willed, He could have taken vengeance upon them [Himself], but [He ordered armed struggle] to test some of you by means of others. And those who are killed in the cause of Allah - He will not waste their deeds.

أَمَّا حَسَبَ الْذِّينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مُّرْضِنُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَصْطَغَاهُمْ

47:29

Translation: Or do those in whose hearts is disease think that Allah would not expose their [feelings of] hatred?
47:34

Translation: Indeed, those who disbelieved and averted [people] from the path of Allah and then died while they were disbelievers - Allah will not forgive them.

47:35

Translation: So do not weaken and call for peace while you are superior; and Allah is with you and will not deprive you of [the reward of] your deeds.

48:23

Translation: [This is] the established way of Allah which has occurred before. And you will not find in the way of Allah any change.

60:3

Translation: Your relatives or your children will not benefit you; the Day of Resurrection He will judge between you. And Allah, of what you do, is Seeing.

72:2

Translation: It guides to the right course, and we have believed in it. And we will not associate with our Lord anyone.

72:5

Translation: And we had thought that mankind and the jinn would not speak about Allah a lie.
Translation: And they had thought, as you thought, that Allah would not send anyone [as a messenger].

وَأَلَّا طَلَّنَا أَنْ نُعِجْزِ اللَّهُ فِي الأَرْضِ وَلَنْ نُعِجْزَهُ هَزْبًا 72:12

Translation: And we have become certain that we will not cause failure to Allah upon earth, nor can we escape Him by flight.

قُلْ إِنِّي لَا أُبِيِّنُ مِن اللَّهِ أَحَدًا وَلَنْ أَجْدَ مِن ذُوِّي مُتَّخِدًا 72:22

Translation: Say, "Indeed, there will not protect me from Allah anyone [if I should disobey], nor will I find in other than Him a refuge.

إِنَّهُ طَلَّنَ أَنْ لَنْ يُخُورَ 14:84

Translation: Indeed, he had thought he would never return [to Allah].

أَيْخَسَبْ أَنْ لَنْ يُفْرَ عَلَيْهِ أَحَدَ 90:5

Translation: Does he think that never will anyone overcome him?

Having looked at the instances in the Qur’an that go in favor of the simple negative future, and having discussed what principle each verse falls under, we can now look at the scant evidence that goes against this meaning, together with the principles that operate on each piece of evidence.

As stated previously, for the perpetual future to be limited temporally really runs contrary to common sense, for what would be the purpose of using indicating perpetuity in the first place? However, 5:24 does seem to be an exception to this rule. Let us revisit it.

قَالُوا يَا مُوسِى إِنَّا لَنَدْخُلَهَا أَبْنَا مَا دَامَوا فِيهَا فَأَقْلِهَا أَنْتُ وَزَرَّآ فَقَالُوا إِنَّا هَاهَا فَاعِلُونَ 24:5
Translation: They said, "O Moses, indeed we will not enter it, ever, as long as they are within it; so go, you and your Lord, and fight. Indeed, we are remaining right here."

This seems to clearly indicate that the author of the Qur’an did not feel it contrary to the dictates of common sense to limit a perpetual future in some way. This, then, would seem to wreak havoc on the aforementioned principle. Nonetheless, our rule stands weakened but can hardly be considered invalidated. So, overall, this instance has the effect of lessening the importance of the many verses quoted as being indicative of lan’s being devoid of perpetuity due to its occurrence with a temporal limit of some sort.

Sometimes, but not always, it is possible to avoid lan and still express the negative future in an unambiguous way (unambiguous in the sense that the tense is clearly the future alone and not the present). If a verse uses lan despite this possibility, it seems to militate against lan denoting mere negation of the future, for if that were the intended meaning, the verse could have been phrased differently. Thus, we have

وَمَا يَعْفَرُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَنْ يُكْفَرُوا وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُتَّقِينَ 3:115

Translation: And whatever good they do – it will not be removed from them. And Allah is Knowing of the righteous.

This could just as easily have been phrased وَمَا يَعْفَرُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَنْ يُكْفَرُوا وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُتَّقِينَ.

(The verb would still have looked the same because it would be in the jussive, and in this specific case the jussive and subjunctive are identical.) The meaning would have been exactly the same, but the author still chose to use لَنْ. The فَ of course, was added because the rule is that when an apodosis has not been put in the jussive by virtue of being the apodosis, then a فَ must be inserted to link it to the protasis.
Translation: If you [disbelievers] seek the victory - the defeat has come to you. And if you desist [from hostilities], it is best for you; but if you return [to war], We will return, and you will not be availed by your [large] company at all, even if it should increase; and [that is] because Allah is with the believers.

Once more, the verb could have just been put in the jussive preceded by the negative particle َﻻ, and the meaning would have been exactly the same. Of course, here the jussive does not look the same as the subjunctive, and would be َﻻ تُغَنت. The verb would have been in the jussive by virtue of being linked by the coordinating conjunction َو with the verb that constitutes the apodosis, namely َتَغُنت.

Both these verses hint that َلاً لَن contains more than just the meaning of future negativity. However, just what that additional meaning is is still not clear in the first case. In the second case, since we already ruled out the meaning of emphasis when we first discussed this verse, we can now conclude that the only possibility is perpetuity.

Another principle that can help us is that when perpetuity is being discussed in the context of the verb, the verb is more likely to contain the same meaning. Thus, we have

Translation: Indeed, those who disbelieve - their wealth or their children will not avail them against Allah at all, and those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally.

The last three words mean “They will abide therein eternally.”, and this would dovetail nicely with the verb َلاً لَن تُغَنت if it contained the meaning of perpetuity.
As mentioned previously, when contrasted with a positive verb, it would make sense for a negative verb to be its exact counterpart, with the only difference being in negativity as opposed to positivity. However, if the second verb contains emphasis, the first verb need not contain it. For instance, if someone said, “The Cubs will win the World Series.” you could certainly respond with “They definitely will not win the World Series.” Therefore, the fact that the second instance of ثﻌﺑ in the following verse contains emphasis does not in any way prove that the first instance contains emphasis too.

زَعمَ الَّذِينَ كَفَّارًا أَنَّ نَٰبِعُونَ فَنَٰبِعُوْنَهُمْ وَنَٰبِعُوْنَ بِمَا عَمِلُوْنَ وَذَلِكَ عَلَى اِنْسَٰبِ ٥٦٤:٧
Translation: Those who disbelieve have claimed that they will not be resurrected. Say, "Yes, by my Lord, you will surely be resurrected; then you will surely be informed of what you did. And that, for Allah, is easy."

In fact, the following verse clearly shows that the second verb’s being emphatic does not necessitate the first verb’s conveying emphasis.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَّارًا لَّا يُؤْمِنُوا بِالساعةَ فَنَٰبِعُوْنَ عَلَٰمَ الْغَيْبِ لَۚ إِنَّ فَٰعَلُهُ مَٰثْلَ دَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ لَا أَصْنُرُ مِن ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْبُرُ إِلَّا بِكُلِّ مَثْلِهِ الْعَظِيمِ ٣٤:٣
Translation: But those who disbelieve say, "The Hour will not come to us." Say, "Yes, by my Lord, it will surely come to you. [Allah is] the Knower of the unseen." Not absent from Him is an atom's weight within the heavens or within the earth or [what is] smaller than that or greater, except that it is in a clear register.

Have dealt with all the instances of أن that occur in the Qur’an, we can now turn to the hadith corpus and see what it can reveal. It is a well-known fact that paraphrasing from generation to generation was rampant among transmitters of hadith, so it may seem
counterintuitive that I wish to look at the hadith, since one cannot be sure the words recorded generations later were really those of the Prophet Muhammad and other native speakers of Arabic. However, it is precisely because people paraphrased so often that it is worth investigating whether they ever paraphrased *lan* and, if so, what word(s) they chose as a substitute. If they always retained *lan* and never paraphrased, that would indicate there was no synonym for it in their mind. On the other hand, if they did substitute something for it, it would show that at least to them the two words meant the same thing.

Thus, in Sahih al-Bukhari we find the following hadith narrated by ‘Awf bin Abi Jamilah, who heard it from al-Hasan al-Basri, who in turn heard it from Abu Bakrah:

> حَدَّثَنَا عُثِمَانُ بْنُ الْهِيْشَمَ حَدَّثَنَا عُوْفٌ عَنْ أَبِي بُكْرَةَ قَالَ لَنْ نَفْعَٰنِي اللَّهُ بِكَلَِّمَتِهِ سَمِيْعُهَا مِنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلِي الله عليه وسلم أَيَّامِ الْجَمْلَ فَأَجَعَلْنَا مَعْهُمْ قَالَ لَمْ يُبْلِغَ رَسُولُ اللهِ صَلِي الله عليه وسلم أَنَّ أَهْلَ فَارِسٍ قَدْ مَلْكَوْا عَلَيْهِمْ بَنتَ كَسْرَى قَالَلَنَّ يَفْلِخَ فَوَّهُمْ وَلَوْ أَمَرْهُمْ امْرَأً

Translation: Indeed Allah benefitted me with a word that I heard from the Messenger of Allah in the days of (the Battle of) the Camel after I almost joined the people of (the Battle of) the Camel. When it reached the Messenger of Allah that the Persians had made the daughter of Khosrau their ruler he said, "A nation that hands its affairs to a woman will not be successful."

The very last sentence is what concerns us, as it contains the word *لَن*. As mentioned previously, we use Ockham’s razor to assume that *لَن* means only the negative future, a meaning that fits here. In other words, although the other two meanings would work as well, we have no reason to depart from our default meaning. Now, let us look at how other native speakers of Arabic narrated the same hadith. Thus, in Sunan at-Tirmidhi and Sunan an-Nisa’i we have
Furthermore, since this new verb is not doubly transitive (while the other one was), a preposition, إلى, is used. Significantly, أن is still present. This shows once again that although the narrator(s) (of this hadith or one of the previous ones) were not careful in reproducing the exact words of the hadith, they still clung to أن.

Then in another part of Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal we find...
Although the first three narrators of this hadith are the same as those in Sunan at-Tirmidhi and Sunan an-Nisa’i, the narrator before them is different. It is quite significant that the word ﻰٓ ﻢ does appear in this hadith, having been replaced by ﻻ. The result is that the indicative rather than the subjunctive is used, of course. However, that is a cosmetic difference. The next verb, ﻣُتَمَّلَك, is also different, and the word “woman”, ﻣُرأَةٌ is its agent rather than direct object. Once more, this shows that either the narrators of this hadith or those of the others were not particular about the exact wording of the hadith. If we take ﻰٓ ﻢ to have our preferred meaning, we can see why a narrator would change it to ﻻ or vice versa, for ﻻ followed by the indicative can mean either the negative present or negative future. Especially in this context it is clear that what is being stated is a general principle pertaining to all times, not just to the present, so the meaning is virtually identical if we take ﻰٓ ﻢ to have our preferred meaning. This is not the case if we take ﻰٓ ﻢ to have one of the other two meanings, for there is neither emphasis nor perpetuity in this version of the hadith.

In another place in Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal we have

Here the final three narrators of the hadith are identical to those in the first hadith from Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal, but the one preceding them is different. The wording is slightly different between the two, for we have ﻰٓ ﻢ instead of ﻰٓ ل. Once more, this seems to clearly indicated that our preferred meaning is the correct one.
In yet another part of Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal we have

\[
\text{حثنا عن نبى حدثنا أبي حثنا عز بن هارون حثنا مبارك بن فضالة عن الحسن عن أبي بكر قال قلء رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم لا يُمَلِّك قومٌ تمليكهم امرأة}
\]

The final two narrators are the same as the second hadith from Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal, but the one preceding them is not Humayd at-Tawil but Mubarak bin Fadhalah. Since the wording is exactly the same, this seems to show that there was originally neither emphasis nor perpetuity, and this lends credibility to the hypothesis that لن had neither of these meanings.

Last but certainly not least, we have the following hadith in Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal

\[
\text{وبي حثنا مبارك عن الحسن عن أبي بكر قال قلء رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم لن يُمَلِّك قومٌ تمليكهم امرأة}
\]

The final three narrators are the same as those in the previous hadith, but the fourth is different: it is Hashim bin al-Qasim rather than Yazid bin Harun. It is quite significant that the word لن has been used rather than لا. Once more, this lends credence to our theory.

We can conclude by saying that based on the simple principle that positive statements should have their negative counterparts, it stands to reason that لن is the negative counterpart to the positive future. Furthermore, based on many principles of linguistic analysis, it is evident that the vast majority of occurrences of لن in the Qur’an support this hypothesis. The handful of verses to the contrary are vastly outweighed both quantitatively and qualitatively by these innumerable verses. Finally, the analysis of the variants of a single hadith lend credence to this theory as well.
Primary sources

*Koran.*


