

Various Interpretations of "The Man of Lawlessness"

We need to be honest ... this passage is not as clear as sometimes we've been led to believe. In the course of my schooling, I had three professors who espoused their views, and all three were different. Below is a list of the different ideas about that at one time or another have been suggested for who this "man of lawlessness" is.

1. **An Empire**--The Roman Empire

2. **An Office**

- a. The (whole line of) Roman Emperors
- b. The Catholic Papacy

3. **Not a Real Person**

- a. A Superstitious, Fictitious Figure (e.g., Tiamat, chaos dragon of the Babylonians, destroyed by God of light, Marduk)
- b. The PRINCIPLE of rebellion vs. God personified

4. **Actual Individuals**

- a. Antiochus Epiphanes
- b. Simon Magnus
- c. A Jewish Anti-Christ [Irenaeus, etc.]
- d. Caligula -- in A.D. 39-40 tried to set his statue up as an object of worship in the temple
- e. Nero
- f. [Domitian?]
- g. Diocletian
- h. Judas Reincarnate
- i. Satan Himself Incarnate (as God was incarnate in Christ)
- j. Michael, or another angel, Incarnate
- k. A Particular Pope--e.g., Gregory the Great (550-604) [Joachim, Luther, Calvin, Wycliffe, Westminster Confession]
- l. Mohammed
- m. Martin Luther
- n. Napoleon
- o. Kaiser Wilhelm
- p. Adolf Hitler
- q. Benito Mussolini
- r. Joseph Stalin
- s. Nikita Krushchev
- t. Henry Kissinger
- u. Head of the World Council of Churches (a liberal "Christian")
- v. Some future ruler over a final empire of evil
- w. Some future head of the New Age Movement

5. Future antichrist (most popular today) - some emphasize political, some religious forerunner antichrists lead up to a climactic antichrist.

Religious:

1. He will arise out of a great rebellion near the end (2:3).
2. Has to be a definite individual person; the man, he, him...
3. He will assume the place of honor and authority due only to god
 - giving credibility by false miracles
 - receive worship

Political:

1. Arise out of a revived roman empire (current talk = ec)
2. Often seen as actually sitting in a rebuilt jewish temple
3. Begin world peace and then move to oppressive rule

In view of the fact that there has been such variation in our understanding, it seems reasonable to consider if maybe there's something we're missing (which clearly there is since Paul says in v. 5 that he's trying to jog their memory of things he told them in person) and maybe an alternative approach might better grasp the text.

On the following page is a comparison of the traditional way the passage is rendered and an alternative approach suggested to me by Dr. Jon Weatherly.

THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS: TWO APPROACHES

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TRADITIONAL	TEXT	AN ALTERNATIVE (fr. Weatherly)
A departure from the true faith or a political rebellion or both which was future from Paul's perspective and, according to most, occurs shortly before the second coming of Christ.	"apostasy"	The Jewish rejection of the gospel and thus rebellion against God. Cf. 1 Thess. 2:14-16.
The archenemy of the Lord who will appear and become active in the future (at least from Paul's perspective), usually shortly before the second coming of Christ.	"man of lawlessness"	Evil (all acts of rebellion against God) manifest in the world behind which stands Satan himself. "The clandestine activity of Satan in this age" (268).
Become active	"reveal"	be unveiled/disclosed
Some power or agency which is holding back the man of lawlessness from acting.	"that which restrains/restrainer"	Not the best translation. Rather, it should be understood as "that which prevails/the prevailer," i.e., lawlessness. The Greek word always means prevail/prevailer when it's used without a direct object as it is here. Thus it's not something that restrains lawlessness. It's describing that lawless seems to prevail in this world. "Evil and the evil one will appear to prevail in this age until Christ returns" (260).
The thing/one who holds back the man of lawlessness will be removed so that the man of lawlessness can become active.	"taken out of the way"	Lawlessness and the lawless one will be removed from prevailing in world when the Lord returns.
Satan works through this specific individual's or group's rebellious activity.	"Satan"	Even though the work of lawlessness is the work of Satan, the world doesn't perceive this. Christians, however, recognize this activity (false wonders and deception) as Satan's work.
Future, as represented by the NIV which inserts "will" in vv. 4, 9.	verb tense	Present, especially in v. 9: "is," not "will be." His coming/presence <i>is</i> . . ." There is not future tense in the Greek in vv. 4, 9.
The day of the Lord has not yet come because certain events which must precede it haven't yet occurred.	main point	"The day of the Lord has not yet come because God's purpose will not be complete until this man of lawlessness already at work in the world, is revealed for who he really is, the archenemy of God and deceiver of humanity." (251).

A Freed-Up Translation Based on the Alternative Reading

3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for the advent (or visitation) of Jesus will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness—who's already at work in this world—is unveiled for who he really is. He's the son of destruction, 4 the one who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God. What I mean is not that He really sits in the temple but that he tries to seize the authority that only God has. 5 Don't you remember that while I was still with you there in Thessalonica I was telling you these things? 6 And you know that lawlessness and this lawless one prevails now, so that eventually he may be unveiled for who he really is. 7 For lawlessness is already at work but for now it's a mystery as to who and what it really is. The lawless one who now prevails will do so only until he is taken out of the way when Jesus returns. Then it will be made clear who that lawless one really is and the Lord will slay him with the breath of His mouth and bring him to an end by the appearance of His coming. 9 At that time, it will become clear that the presence of the lawless one—I mean all the rebellious and lawless activity in this world—is actually the work of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.