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Lecture 10B – Matthew 24:1-31: The Eschatological Discourse I: Introduction and Prophecy

NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Briefing Document, 3) Study Guide, FAQs

1) Abstract

This academic lecture, focusing on **Matthew 24:1-31**, introduces the **Olivet Discourse**, a significant biblical passage. The speaker outlines **three main interpretations** of this discourse: **Preterist**, suggesting fulfillment in 70 CE; **Futurist**, positing fulfillment only at Christ's second coming; and the **Preterist-Futurist view**, which the lecture supports, seeing an intertwining of historical events (70 CE) and future eschatological fulfillment. The discourse's initial section (Matthew 24:4-14) is understood as describing ongoing **challenges for the church** throughout history, followed by a more intense section (Matthew 24:15-28) concerning the **desecration of the temple**, which serves as a prefigurement for ultimate judgment. Finally, the lecture discusses **Matthew 24:29-31**, highlighting its extensive Old Testament allusions and its depiction of the **Son of Man's glorious coming** to gather the elect, emphasizing the future and transformative nature of this event, rather than a past, localized occurrence.

2) Briefing Document: Detailed Briefing: Matthew 24-25 – The Olivet or Eschatological Discourse

This briefing reviews Dr. David Turner's lecture 10b on Matthew 24:1-31, which covers the introductory aspects and the initial prophecy section of the Olivet Discourse.

I. Introduction to the Olivet Discourse and Interpretive Approaches

The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25) is a crucial passage presenting significant interpretive challenges, primarily concerning the relationship between the

destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70 and the eschatological judgment at Christ's second coming.

A. Key Interpretive Views

Turner identifies three main views:

1. **Preterist View:**

- **Core Idea:** "Most or all of the predictions of the discourse were fulfilled in AD 70, when the Romans destroyed the temple."
- **Partial Preterism:** Matthew 24:1-35 describes the AD 70 destruction, with only 24:36 onwards referring to Jesus' eschatological return.
- **Full/Comprehensive Preterism:** Attempts to explain the *entire* discourse as fulfilled in AD 70, which Turner finds "very difficult."
- **Motivation for Full Preterism:** Often driven by an interpretation of Matthew 24:34, which is taken as Jesus' promise that "everything he has spoken of will be accomplished during the lives of his contemporaries."
- **Difficulties with Preterism (Turner's critique):** "Truncation of Christ's eschatological program, which is to bring the reign of heaven to the earth."
- Struggles to explain the "global language of Matthew 24," such as "the end of the age" (24:3), "nation rising against nation" (24:7), the "gospel goes to the whole world" (24:14), "unparalleled tribulation" (24:21-22), and the "clear coming of the Son of Man just as clear as lightning in the sky" (24:27), which seem to describe more than a local event in AD 70.

1. **Futurist View:**

- **Core Idea:** "The discourse concerns only the return of Christ to the earth."
- **Implication:** Jesus is seen as largely ignoring the disciples' initial question about the temple's destruction (24:3), focusing solely on the "coming of the end of the age."
- **Advocates:** Often "dispensationally oriented scholars" like Walvoord and Toussaint.

1. **Preterist-Futurist View (Turner's Preferred Approach):**

- **Core Idea:** "The predictions of Jesus' discourse intertwine both the historical destruction of Jerusalem in 70 and the yet future return of Jesus."
- **Variations:** Some distinguish specific portions for AD 70 vs. end times; others see AD 70 events as "a partial or anticipatory fulfillment of what is consummated at Christ's return."
- **Underlying Concept:** "Prophetic perspective, or foreshortening, or double near and far fulfillment."
- **Conclusion:** "Jesus' eschatological discourse answers both parts of the disciples' question. His words about the fall of the temple provide the reader with a preliminary picture which anticipates as a token the ultimate end of the world when Jesus Christ returns, which of course is yet future."
- **Rationale:** "Both of the above views, both the strict Preterist and the strict Futurist views, are one-sided, and they are therefore inadequate to handle the complexities of this passage." The disciples asked about both the temple's destruction and the end of the world.

B. Contextual Overview of the Olivet Discourse

- **Setting (24:1):** Jesus leaves the temple after extensive conflict with Jewish leaders (21:17ff.), pronouncing judgment upon Israel (23:38).
- **Disciples' Question (24:1-3):** The disciples draw attention to the temple's grandeur, but Jesus prophesies its demolition. Their question links the temple's destruction with Jesus' return at the end of the age, likely assuming they would occur simultaneously.
- **Structure: Didactic Section (24:4-31):** Prophetic instruction.
- 24:4-14: "First pains of childbirth" – preliminaries characterizing the entire period between Jesus' comings.
- 24:15-28: Intense and ominous language describing temple desecration and unparalleled tribulation, primarily envisioning the AD 70 destruction as a "token of the ultimate judgment."
- 24:29-31: Jesus' coming to judge humankind, described with Old Testament apocalyptic imagery.

- **Practical Exhortation (24:32-25:46):** Shifts from "the what to the so what."
- 24:32-36: Parabolic imagery emphasizing urgency and the unknown time of His coming.
- Emphasis on alertness (Noah, 24:37-44; wise servant, 24:45-51; wise/foolish virgins, 25:1-13).
- Emphasis on faithful use of gifts (talents, 25:14-30).
- Picture of the last judgment (25:31-46).
- **Overall Purpose:** "Biblical prophecy includes more than mere prediction. The knowledge of what God will do in the future, 24:1-31, must have a profound effect upon God's people in the present, 24.32-25:46." The discourse aims to maintain disciples' faith and encourage "alertness, faithfulness, fruitfulness, and service."

C. Relationship to Synoptic Gospels

- Matthew's version is "much longer than that of Mark and Luke," particularly due to the unique parables (servant, ten virgins, talents) and the judgment of the nations (24:45-25:46).
- Similarities exist in the setting and "beginning of birth pains" sections.
- Differences are noted in the "abomination of desolation" and "coming of the Son of Man" sections.

II. The First Pains of Childbirth (Matthew 24:1-14)

A. Disciples' Question vs. Jesus' Answer

- Disciples' primary concern: "timing, since they want to know when, and they want to know how to know when, by discerning the preliminary sign." They link the temple's destruction with Jesus' return.
- Jesus' non-precise answer: "He does not answer their question precisely in 24:4 to 14."
- **Key Idea:** Jesus warns against assuming immediate culmination. "In 24:6, he says all these things do not mean that the end is here. In 24:8 he says these

things are just the first pains of childbirth, which hints that there may be an extended time of labor before the end."

- **Implication:** "Therefore, the disciples need to ponder not the chronology of the end times, but their own ethical responsibility to persevere in faithful discipleship and kingdom ministry." (24:13: "they that endure to the end will be saved.")
- **Conclusion:** "The disciples have asked the wrong question, but Jesus has just the same given them the right answer."

B. Characteristics of the Present Age

- Jesus mentions general events like "false messiahs and prophets, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, apostasy, betrayal, and lawlessness."
- These are "rather general, and they occur so frequently in the history of the church that they would be of no real help if one intended to precisely calculate when the temple would be destroyed."
- These difficulties characterize the church's experience "throughout its existence until Jesus returns."
- 24:14 indicates "there will be enough time for the kingdom message to be preached throughout the world before the end comes."

III. Desecration of the Holy Place (Matthew 24:15-28)

A. Warning and Instructions

- **Content:** "A warning of intense, unparalleled persecution and false prophecy which will arise in connection with the desecration of the Jerusalem temple."
- **Elements:** Instructions for flight (24:16-20), a promise that "God will shorten those days for the sake of his elect" (24:21-22), and renewed warning against false messiahs/prophets (24:23-28).
- **Interpretive Lens:** This warning "relates primarily to the destruction of the temple in 70, but there is good reason... to see this warning as ultimately intended for God's people in the end times who will face the ultimate Antichrist."

- **Existential Question:** Beyond chronological debates, the core question is "the need for wisdom in grasping the providence of God." How does one "reconcile God's permitting his elect to suffer with his concern that their suffering not result in their spiritual ruin"? Suffering is a "way of life for his disciples throughout the whole period between his comings."

B. Theology of the Abomination of Desolation

- **Complex Typology:** Jesus' reference to the "sacrilegious desecration of the temple in 24:15 calls up a complex typology of prophecy and fulfillment reaching all the way from Nebuchadnezzar in the Hebrew Bible to the ultimate eschatological Antichrist."
- **Continuum of Fulfillment (Examples):** Nebuchadnezzar's conquest (605 BCE).
- Antiochus IV Epiphanes' sacrilege (167 BCE).
- Roman conquest (63 BCE).
- Caligula's plan to set up his bust (c. 40-41 CE).
- Zealots' misuse of temple precincts before AD 70.
- Roman destruction of the temple (AD 70).
- Roman desolation after Bar Kokhba revolt (AD 135).
- **Yet Future:** "There is yet a future ultimate sacrilege of the Antichrist against the temple."
- **Conclusion:** There is "no warrant for supposing that the desecration mentioned in 24:15, which echoes Daniel, is a narrow prediction which is fulfilled solely by either the past 70 destruction of Jerusalem or by the future Antichrist." Instead, historical desolations are "anticipatory fulfillments which lead up to the ultimate desolation in the end times."

IV. The Coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:29-31)

A. Old Testament Allusions

- **Permeated with Imagery:** This passage is "permeated with imagery drawn from the Old Testament."

- **Crucial Text:** Daniel 7 is the "crucial text," depicting God as "an awesome judge, the Ancient of Days," who grants "universal dominion" to the Son of Man and his people, while judging the "eschatological enemy of God and of Israel, the little horn."
- **Reversal Motif:** As in Daniel 7, the "coming of the Son of Man ends the persecution and suffering of God's saints and begins their glorious rule with Jesus."
- **Other Allusions:** Darkening of sun/moon, falling stars (cosmic signs), coming on clouds (Daniel 7:13-14), mourning of tribes (Zechariah 12), blowing of trumpet (Isaiah 27), gathering of the elect.

B. Exposition and Theological Point

- **Description:** The passage describes "the climactic heavenly signs which immediately precede the coming of Jesus, then that glorious coming itself, and the purpose of that coming, to gather God's elect for their reward."
- **Reversal of "Business as Usual":** The coming of Jesus represents a reversal. "During this time in between the comings, the disciples have been mourning over their many persecutions... But now it is their persecutors who will be mourning... as the disciples experience the joyful reward of their master." (Compare 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).
- **Perpetual Theme in Matthew:** "The glorious coming of Jesus is a notion that permeates Matthew's view of the future."
- **Timing:** While the "date of this coming is unknown, Jesus' disciples must not assume that it's in the distant future. Rather, they must alertly expect Jesus' return and faithfully serve him until that day."
- **Post-Tribulational Rapture Implication:** "The coming of Jesus is placed after the tribulation of those days in 24, 29, which may give advocates of the pre-tribulational rapture theory some pause."
- **Results of the Coming:** The "reign of heaven will come to earth more fully," "all nations will be judged, and the disciples of Jesus will be rewarded." This fulfills Beatitude promises and other passages promising future reward.

C. Preterist Interpretation of 24:29-31

- **Symbolic Interpretation:** Preterists view these verses "as speaking symbolically of the theological significance of the destruction of the temple."
- **"Coming of Jesus":** Not His literal return to earth, but "his coming to heaven to be exalted after his resurrection."
- **Significance:** This exaltation is "played out in the judgment on Israel demonstrated by the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70."
- **"Tribulation/Anguish":** Interpreted as "the horrific conditions experienced by the zealots in Jerusalem during the days prior to the Roman attack."
- **"Heavenly Disturbances":** Symbolically fulfilled by phenomena observed during the siege (e.g., Josephus' accounts of strange signs).
- **"Gathering of the Elect":** Viewed as "the mission of the church in discipling all the nations" (paralleling 24:14 and 28:19).

3) Study Guide:

Understanding Matthew 24-25: The Olivet Discourse

This study guide is designed to help you review the provided lecture material on Matthew 24-25, specifically focusing on Matthew 24:1-31, the first part of the Olivet or Eschatological Discourse.

I. Introduction to the Olivet Discourse

- **A. Purpose of the Discourse:** Jesus' response to the disciples' questions about the temple's destruction and the end of the age.
- **B. Core Interpretive Question:** The relationship between the AD 70 destruction of the temple and the eschatological judgment at Christ's Second Coming.
- **C. Main Interpretive Views:**
 - 1. Preterist View:** Most or all predictions fulfilled in AD 70.
 - Partial Preterist:** 24:1-35 refers to AD 70; 24:36ff refers to Christ's return.
 - Full/Comprehensive Preterist:** Entire discourse fulfilled in AD 70.

- **Challenges:** Difficult to reconcile with passages that seem to describe a global, future event.
- **2. Futurist View:** Discourse concerns *only* the return of Christ.
- Jesus ignores the question about the temple's destruction.
- **Challenges:** One-sided, ignores the disciples' explicit question about the temple.
- **3. Preterist-Futurist View (Adopted in Lecture):** Predictions intertwine the historical destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70) and the future return of Jesus.
- Recognizes elements of both past fulfillment and future consummation.
- **Concepts involved:** Prophetic perspective, foreshortening, double near and far fulfillment.
- **Key Idea:** AD 70 serves as a "token" or preliminary picture anticipating the ultimate end of the world.

II. Contextual Overview of the Olivet Discourse

- **A. Setting (24:1-3):**
- Jesus leaves the temple after conflict with Jewish leaders.
- Disciples admire the temple's grandeur; Jesus prophesies its demolition.
- Disciples' question: When will the temple be destroyed, and when will Jesus return/end of the age? They linked these events as simultaneous.
- **B. Structure of the Discourse:**
- **1. Didactic Section (24:4-31):** Prophecy and warnings.
- **a. "First Pains of Childbirth" (24:4-14):** **Description:** False messiahs, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, apostasy, betrayal, lawlessness.
- **Interpretation:** Preliminaries characterizing the entire period between Jesus' comings. Not indicators of imminent end, but general difficulties the church faces throughout history.

- **Purpose:** Not for date-setting, but for ethical responsibility, perseverance, and kingdom ministry (preaching the gospel worldwide).
- **Comparison:** Similarities to Revelation 6:1ff (Four Horsemen), portraying ongoing church experience.
- **b. Desecration of the Holy Place / Great Tribulation (24:15-28):****Description:** Warning of intense, unparalleled persecution and false prophecy linked to temple desecration, instructions for flight, God shortening days for the elect, renewed warnings against false messiahs/prophets.
- **Primary Reference:** AD 70 destruction of the temple.
- **Ultimate Reference:** Anticipates God's people facing the ultimate Antichrist in the end times.
- **Existential Question:** Reconciling God's permission of suffering with his concern for his elect. Suffering as a way of life, intensifying towards the end, but permitted for God's goals.
- **Typology of Abomination of Desolation:**Complex continuum of fulfillments: Nebuchadnezzar (605 BCE), Antiochus IV Epiphanes (167 BCE), Roman conquest (63 BCE), Caligula's plan (c. 40-41 CE), Zealots' misuse of temple (before 70 CE), Roman destruction (70 CE), Roman desolation (135 CE), and yet future ultimate Antichrist.
- **Conclusion:** Not a narrow prediction, but anticipatory fulfillments leading to the ultimate desolation.
- **c. Coming of the Son of Man (24:29-31):****Imagery:** Permeated with Old Testament allusions, especially Daniel 7 (Ancient of Days, Son of Man's dominion, judgment of the "little horn"). Also cosmic signs (sun, moon, stars), trumpet, gathering of the elect.
- **Exposition:** Climactic heavenly signs preceding Jesus' coming, the glorious coming itself, and the purpose of gathering God's elect for reward.
- **Reversal Motif:** Disciples' suffering ends, persecutors mourn; disciples experience joy and reward.

- **Theological Point:** Glorious coming permeates Matthew. Date unknown, but disciples must alertly expect and faithfully serve. Placed *after* tribulation.
- **Preterist Interpretation of 24:29-31:** Symbolic of theological significance of temple destruction.
- Jesus' "coming" as exaltation to heaven after resurrection, played out in judgment on Israel (AD 70).
- Tribulation as conditions before Roman attack.
- Heavenly disturbances as phenomena observed during siege (Josephus).
- Gathering of elect as church's mission (24:14, 28:19).
- **Motivation:** 24:34 ("this generation") implies fulfillment within contemporaries' lives.
- **Difficulties:** Truncates Christ's eschatological program; global language of Matthew 24 seems to require a future, not local, event.
- **C. Matthew's Version Compared to Mark and Luke (Synoptic Problem):**
 - Matthew's version is much longer.
 - Similarities in setting and "beginning of birth pains."
 - Differences in "abomination of desolation" and "coming of the Son of Man."
 - Major distinction: Matthew includes parables of the servant, ten virgins, talents, and judgment of nations (24:45-25:46) which have no parallel in other Gospels.
 - **Overall emphasis:** Prophecy (24:1-31) must profoundly affect present conduct (24:32-25:46), leading to alertness, faithfulness, fruitfulness, and service, not date-setting.

Quiz: Short Answer Questions

1. What is the "crucial question" in interpreting the Olivet Discourse, and what are the two main events whose relationship is debated?
2. Briefly describe the core tenet of the Preterist view regarding the Olivet Discourse. What is a key challenge or difficulty for this view?

3. What is the main characteristic of the Futurist view? According to the lecturer, what is a primary inadequacy of this approach?
4. Explain the Preterist-Futurist view adopted in the lecture. What concepts are involved in this approach to understanding Jesus' predictions?
5. What do the "first pains of childbirth" (Matthew 24:4-14) signify according to the lecture? What is their practical purpose for disciples?
6. How does the lecture interpret the "abomination of desolation" in Matthew 24:15? What is the "complex typology" involved in this prophecy?
7. Beyond the AD 70 destruction of the temple, what ultimate fulfillment does the lecture suggest for the "desecration of the holy place"?
8. What is the primary Old Testament text alluded to in Matthew 24:29-31 concerning the "coming of the Son of Man"? What is the key motif described in this coming?
9. How do Preterists typically interpret the "coming of the Son of Man" in Matthew 24:29-31, and what specific motivation drives this interpretation?
10. According to the lecture, what is the overall message of the Olivet Discourse concerning the relationship between future prophecy and present-day discipleship?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The crucial question is the relation of the AD 70 destruction of the temple to the eschatological judgment of God at Christ's Second Coming. The two events whose relationship is debated are the AD 70 destruction of the temple and Christ's future return.
2. The Preterist view holds that most or all of the predictions of the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled in AD 70 with the Roman destruction of the temple. A key difficulty for this view is explaining passages with global language or those that seem to describe a yet-future, unparalleled event.
3. The main characteristic of the Futurist view is that the discourse concerns only the return of Christ to the earth. Its primary inadequacy is that it is one-

sided, failing to adequately address the disciples' initial question about the destruction of the temple.

4. The Preterist-Futurist view suggests that Jesus' predictions intertwine both the historical destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the yet-future return of Jesus. This approach involves concepts like prophetic perspective, foreshortening, and double near and far fulfillment.
5. The "first pains of childbirth" signify preliminaries that characterize the entire period between Jesus' comings, such as wars, famines, and persecutions. Their practical purpose is not for date-setting, but to encourage ethical responsibility, perseverance, and ongoing kingdom ministry.
6. The lecture interprets the "abomination of desolation" as primarily relating to the AD 70 destruction of the temple, but also anticipating a future Antichrist. It involves a complex typology of fulfillment, including events from Nebuchadnezzar to the Roman destruction and beyond.
7. Beyond the AD 70 destruction, the lecture suggests that the "desecration of the holy place" ultimately anticipates a future, ultimate sacrilege committed by the Antichrist against the temple. Historical events serve as anticipatory fulfillments leading to this final desolation.
8. The primary Old Testament text alluded to in Matthew 24:29-31 is Daniel 7. The key motif described in this coming is reversal, where the suffering of God's saints ends, and their persecutors mourn as the saints begin their glorious rule with Jesus.
9. Preterists interpret the "coming of the Son of Man" in Matthew 24:29-31 as symbolic of Jesus' exaltation to heaven after his resurrection, the significance of which is played out in the judgment on Israel (AD 70). This interpretation is largely motivated by their understanding of Matthew 24:34, which they believe promises fulfillment within Jesus' contemporaries' lifetimes.
10. The overall message is that biblical prophecy includes more than mere prediction; the knowledge of what God will do in the future (24:1-31) must have a profound effect on God's people in the present (24:32-25:46). This leads to alertness, faithfulness, fruitfulness, and service, rather than date-setting.

Essay Format Questions

1. Compare and contrast the Preterist, Futurist, and Preterist-Futurist views on the interpretation of Matthew 24. Argue which view most adequately handles the complexities of the passage, drawing specific examples from the lecture material.
2. Discuss the significance of the "first pains of childbirth" (Matthew 24:4-14) for the disciples and for the church throughout history. How does Jesus reframe their question about timing into a message about ethical responsibility and perseverance?
3. Analyze the concept of "typology of prophecy and fulfillment" as applied to the "abomination of desolation" in Matthew 24:15. Provide specific historical examples mentioned in the lecture and explain how they relate to the ultimate eschatological fulfillment.
4. Explore the Old Testament allusions, particularly Daniel 7, in Matthew 24:29-31 concerning the "coming of the Son of Man." Explain how this passage describes a "reversal motif" and its theological implications for both the persecutors and God's elect.
5. The lecture argues that the Olivet Discourse makes it clear that biblical prophecy affects present-day actions. Discuss how the prophetic content of Matthew 24:1-31 is intended to shape the ethical conduct and spiritual posture of Jesus' disciples in the present, drawing on the concluding remarks of the lecture.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Abomination of Desolation:** A sacrilegious act that defiles a holy place, specifically the temple in Jerusalem. In the context of Matthew 24:15, it refers to a complex typology of historical desecrations culminating in the AD 70 Roman destruction and anticipating a future ultimate Antichrist.
- **Antichrist:** A future, ultimate opponent of God and Christ, whose sacrilege against the temple is anticipated in the Olivet Discourse.
- **Ancient of Days:** A title for God the Father, depicted as an awesome judge in Daniel 7, who passes sentence in favor of the Son of Man.

- **Double Near and Far Fulfillment:** A concept in prophetic interpretation where a prophecy has both a near-term, historical fulfillment and a more distant, ultimate eschatological fulfillment.
- **Eschatological Discourse:** Another name for the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25), referring to its focus on the "last things" or end times.
- **First Pains of Childbirth:** A phrase used in Matthew 24:8 to describe the general afflictions and difficulties (wars, famines, persecutions, etc.) that characterize the entire period between Jesus' first and second comings, not necessarily signaling the immediate end.
- **Foreshortening (Prophetic Perspective):** A concept where prophetic descriptions appear to bring together events that are actually separated by long periods of time, similar to how distant mountains appear close together to the eye.
- **Futurist View:** An interpretation of the Olivet Discourse that understands most or all of its predictions as concerning only the yet-future return of Christ and the end of the age, largely ignoring the AD 70 destruction of the temple.
- **Olivet Discourse:** Jesus' discourse given on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24-25), in response to his disciples' questions about the destruction of the temple and the sign of his coming and the end of the age.
- **Preterist View:** An interpretation of the Olivet Discourse that understands most or all of its predictions as having been fulfilled in AD 70 with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and its temple.
- **Preterist-Futurist View:** An interpretation of the Olivet Discourse that blends elements of both the Preterist and Futurist views, seeing Jesus' predictions as intertwining the historical destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 with the yet-future return of Jesus. This view often sees AD 70 as a "token" or anticipatory fulfillment.
- **Reversal Motif:** A recurring theme in Matthew 24:29-31 and other passages, where the suffering and mourning experienced by Jesus' disciples are transformed into joy and reward, while their persecutors experience judgment and mourning.

- **Son of Man:** A significant messianic title used by Jesus, referring to his divine authority, coming judgment, and glorious return, particularly drawing from Daniel 7.
- **Synoptic Gospels:** The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which share significant similarities in content, order, and wording, suggesting a literary interdependence.
- **Typology:** A method of biblical interpretation where a person, event, or institution in the Old Testament serves as a "type" or pattern that foreshadows a corresponding "anti-type" or fulfillment in the New Testament or future eschatological events.

4) FAQs: 1. What is the "Olivet Discourse" and what are its main interpretations?

The Olivet Discourse, found in Matthew 24 and 25, is a significant teaching by Jesus concerning future events. The core interpretative challenge is understanding the relationship between the destruction of the temple in AD 70 and God's final eschatological judgment at Christ's second coming. There are three primary views:

- **Preterist View:** This view holds that most or all of the predictions in the discourse were fulfilled in AD 70 with the Roman destruction of the temple. Partial Preterists believe Matthew 24:1-35 refers to AD 70, with only 24:36 onwards referring to Jesus' eschatological return. Full Preterists attempt to interpret the entire discourse as having been fulfilled in AD 70.
- **Futurist View:** In contrast, this view asserts that the discourse exclusively concerns the future return of Christ to Earth. It suggests Jesus largely bypasses the disciples' question about the temple's destruction and focuses solely on the end of the age.
- **Preterist-Futurist View:** This approach, advocated in the source, argues that Jesus' predictions intertwine both the historical destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the yet-future return of Jesus. It often incorporates concepts like prophetic perspective, foreshortening, or "double near and far fulfillment,"

where events in AD 70 serve as an anticipatory fulfillment of what will be fully consummated at Christ's return.

2. How does the Olivet Discourse address the disciples' questions about the temple's destruction and the end of the age?

The disciples, in Matthew 24:1-3, ask Jesus about the timing of the temple's demolition and, seemingly, connect it directly with His return at the end of the age, assuming these two events would happen concurrently. Jesus' Olivet Discourse addresses both aspects of their question, though not in a simple chronological manner.

The discourse is structured in two main parts. Matthew 24:4-31 is primarily didactic, laying out preliminary signs and a warning about intensified tribulation. Matthew 24:32-25:46 then shifts to practical exhortation, emphasizing alertness, faithfulness, and service in light of the unknown time of His coming.

The source argues that Jesus' words about the fall of the temple provide a "preliminary picture which anticipates as a token the ultimate end of the world when Jesus Christ returns." This suggests a dual fulfillment: an immediate fulfillment in AD 70 and a more ultimate, future fulfillment at the end of the age.

3. What is the significance of the "first pains of childbirth" mentioned in Matthew 24:4-14?

Matthew 24:4-14 describes various general difficulties such as false messiahs, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, and apostasy. Jesus explicitly states in 24:6 that "all these things do not mean that the end is here," and in 24:8, "these things are just the first pains of childbirth."

According to the interpretation presented, these "first pains" characterize the entire period between Jesus' comings. They are not specific chronological indicators of the imminent end, nor are they exclusively fulfilled before AD 70 or only in the future. Instead, they represent the types of afflictions the church has faced throughout its history. This section emphasizes that the disciples should focus not on date-setting but on their ethical responsibility to persevere in faithful discipleship and kingdom ministry, as "they that endure to the end will be saved" (24:13). This period also allows for the global proclamation of the kingdom message (24:14).

4. How does the "abomination of desolation" in Matthew 24:15-28 relate to historical events and future prophecy?

Matthew 24:15-28, which warns of intense persecution and false prophecy connected to the "desecration of the Jerusalem temple," primarily relates to the destruction of the temple in AD 70. However, the source emphasizes that this warning also has an ultimate intention for God's people in the end times who will face the "ultimate Antichrist."

The "abomination of desolation" calls up a complex typology of prophecy and fulfillment that spans several historical events, including:

- Nebuchadnezzar's conquest (605 BCE)
- Antiochus IV Epiphanes' sacrilege against the temple (167 BCE)
- The Roman conquest of the Hasmonean kingdom (63 BCE)
- Emperor Caligula's plan to set up his bust in the temple (c. 40-41 CE)
- The Zealots' misuse of the temple precincts before AD 70
- The Roman destruction of the temple in AD 70
- The Roman desolation in 135 CE after the Bar Kokhba revolt
- A future, ultimate sacrilege by the Antichrist.

This suggests that Jesus' reference in 24:15 is not a narrow prediction fulfilled by a single event, but rather part of a "continuum of fulfillment," where historical desolations serve as "anticipatory fulfillments" leading up to the ultimate desolation in the end times.

5. What is the theological significance of the coming of the Son of Man in Matthew 24:29-31?

Matthew 24:29-31 describes climactic heavenly signs, the glorious coming of Jesus, and His purpose in gathering the elect for their reward. This passage is deeply rooted in Old Testament imagery, particularly Daniel 7, which depicts God as an awesome judge granting universal dominion to the Son of Man. The coming of the Son of Man signifies a "reversal" motif: the end of persecution and suffering for

God's saints and the beginning of their glorious rule with Jesus, while their persecutors will mourn.

From a Futurist perspective, this passage clearly describes a literal, future return of Jesus to Earth, following a period of tribulation. This return will establish the reign of heaven on Earth more fully, result in the judgment of all nations, and the rewarding of Jesus' disciples, fulfilling promises like those in the Beatitudes.

Conversely, a Preterist understanding interprets these verses symbolically, focusing on the theological significance of the temple's destruction. They view Jesus' "coming" as His exaltation to heaven after His resurrection, with its significance played out in the judgment on Israel demonstrated by the AD 70 destruction. The "tribulation" is seen as the conditions in Jerusalem before the Roman attack, and heavenly disturbances as symbolic phenomena observed during that time. The gathering of the elect is interpreted as the church's mission to disciple all nations.

The source leans towards the Futurist interpretation for 24:29-31 due to the "global language" used (e.g., "end of the age," "nation rising against nation," gospel to the "whole world," "unparalleled tribulation," clear coming "as lightning"), which seems to transcend a local event like the AD 70 destruction.

6. How does Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse compare to those in Mark and Luke?

While the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) all present versions of the Olivet Discourse, Matthew's account is significantly longer and includes unique material.

Similarities exist in:

- The setting of the discourse (Matthew 24:1-3 parallels Mark 13:1-4 and Luke 21:5-7).
- The description of the "beginning of birth pains" (Matthew 24:4-14, Mark 13:5-13, Luke 21:8-19).
- The lesson of the fig tree (Matthew 24:32-35, Mark 13:28-31, Luke 21:29-33).

Differences include:

- Matthew's version of the "abomination of desolation" (Matthew 24:15-28) is slightly longer than Mark's, while Luke's section on the armies around Jerusalem is much shorter.
- Matthew's treatment of the "coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24:29-31) is slightly longer.
- Matthew uniquely includes material on the "days of Noah" (Matthew 24:37-44) in relation to the fig tree lesson.
- Most notably, Matthew's Gospel contains extensive unique material on the necessity of alertness, specifically the parables of the wise servant (24:45-51), the ten virgins (25:1-13), the talents (25:14-30), and the picturesque judgment of the nations (25:31-46). These sections have no parallel in Mark or Luke, making Matthew's version "quite unique."

7. What is the practical application of the Olivet Discourse for believers?

The Olivet Discourse, particularly Matthew 24:32-25:46, shifts from prophecy to practical exhortation. Its core message is that biblical prophecy is not merely about future prediction but must profoundly affect God's people in the present.

Key practical applications include:

- **Avoiding Date-Setting:** Understanding the discourse should lead believers away from attempts to precisely calculate the timing of the end.
- **Alertness:** Believers are urged to be alert and expect Jesus' return, given that the specific time is unknown. This is highlighted by references to Noah's day and parables like the wise servant and wise/foolish virgins.
- **Faithfulness and Fruitfulness:** The parables, especially the parable of the talents, stress the importance of faithfully using God's gifts and being fruitful in ministry until His return.
- **Service to "Little Brothers":** The discourse concludes with the judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:31-46), emphasizing compassionate service to the marginalized and suffering ("the little ones"), indicating Jesus' continued concern for them.

- **Perseverance in Suffering:** The discourse acknowledges that suffering is a "way of life" for disciples and will intensify, but God wisely permits it for His own goals, enabling believers to endure and ultimately reign victoriously with Jesus.

In essence, the discourse helps "maintain the disciples' faith" by directing their focus from chronological curiosity to ethical responsibility and faithful living in light of Christ's eventual return.

8. What are some of the key difficulties or challenges in interpreting the Olivet Discourse?

Interpreting the Olivet Discourse presents several challenges:

- **Reconciling AD 70 and the End Times:** The "crucial question" is how to relate the historical destruction of the temple in AD 70 to the eschatological judgment at Christ's second coming. Different interpretative views (Preterist, Futurist, Preterist-Futurist) offer varied solutions, each with its own difficulties. The source argues against strict Preterist or Futurist views as "one-sided and therefore inadequate."
- **Prophetic Foreshortening/Double Fulfillment:** Understanding how Jesus' prophecy might have both a "near" fulfillment (AD 70) and a "far" or "ultimate" fulfillment (the end times) requires careful discernment and recognizing the concept of prophetic perspective, where events are seen compressed together without necessarily indicating an immediate temporal connection.
- **Symbolic vs. Literal Language:** Deciding when language should be interpreted symbolically (e.g., heavenly disturbances by Preterists) versus literally (e.g., Jesus' physical return by Futurists) is a significant point of contention, particularly in Matthew 24:29-31.
- **The Disciples' Question vs. Jesus' Answer:** The disciples ask about the "when" and "how to know when," implying a desire for specific signs and timing. However, Jesus' answer in 24:4-14, describing "first pains of childbirth," warns against assuming imminent end from general turmoil, redirecting their focus from chronology to ethical living and perseverance. This suggests that the disciples' "wrong question" received Jesus' "right answer."

- **Scope of Tribulation:** The "unparalleled great tribulation" described in 24:21 raises questions about whether this refers exclusively to the suffering in AD 70 or a future global tribulation. Preterists tend to limit it to AD 70, while Futurists and Preterist-Futurists often see a broader, ultimate fulfillment.
- **The "This Generation" Clause (24:34):** Although not extensively detailed in the provided source, the "this generation" phrase is a primary motivator for Preterist interpretations, as they take it to mean all prophecies must be fulfilled within the lifetime of Jesus' contemporaries, leading to non-literal interpretations of His return. This clashes with the "global language" elsewhere in the discourse, which seems to demand a future, worldwide event.