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Lightning That Flashes from the East

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus warns his disciples about "false messiahs and false prophets will appear . . . to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (24:24). Then he assures them, "As the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (24:27).

The point seems to be that the consummation of the ages will be an event so grand that no one will be have to wonder whether it has occurred.

The reference, however, became a metaphor for redemption in general: those who are beleaguered should look to the horizon and watch for the lightning that flashes from one part of the sky to the other (cf. Luke 17:24).

"I Shall Be Released" by Bob Dylan (1967): America's iconic songwriter Bob Dylan used this imagery in one of his best-known songs:

I see my light come shining

From the west unto the east

The song was first recorded by The Band on their 1968 debut album, *Music from Big Pink*, then by Joan Baez, Dylan himself, and countless other artists, including many gospel singers.

Notably, Dylan got the direction of the lightning backward (from west to east, instead of the reverse). Perhaps he misremembered the Bible verse or maybe it just didn't fit his rhyme scheme. In any case, Dylan's line has become so well known that it is now commonplace to hear preachers and others talk about the lightning that flashes "from the west to the east" as a symbol of impending liberation.