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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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ANCIENT LIGHTNING-RODS?

Not long after Benjamin Franklin invented the lightning-rod, several scholars endeavored to prove from statements found in ancient works that more or less similar contrivances were known to the ancient Hindus, Greeks, Romans, Hebrews, and other peoples. None of their contentions on this subject were conclusive and the idea is no longer entertained by any competent authority, but it still crops up from time to time.

J. D. Michaelis, a German biblical scholar of the eighteenth century, appears to have been the first to champion the belief that the Temple at Jerusalem was protected by lightning-rods. Josephus has left us a description of the multitude of gilded iron points projecting from the golden roof of the building, but he also states that these points were intended to keep the roof clean by preventing birds from lighting on it. The Temple he describes was the one built by Herod, and we do not know whether the original Temple of Solomon, or its successor, built by Zerubbabel, was similarly adorned.

Arago and other authorities have suggested that these points, together with the gilded roof, the gilded plating of the walls and the metal pipes that carried the rain water from the roof to cisterns all served to protect the building from lightning though they were not designed for that purpose.

It appears that there is no record of one of the three Temples having ever been struck by lightning, but thunderstorms are not very common at Jerusalem; modern statistics show an average of seven a year.

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