

Monday, January 2, 2023 - Biographical Sketch of George N.H. Peters.
By Roger Feenstra

The Theocratic Kingdom by George N.H. Peters

Originally published in 1884. Three-volume set.

Format: The book is laid out in *Propositions* rather than in chapters. Each *Proposition* contains several *Observations*.

Volume 1: Contains 106 propositions

Volume 2: Contains 58 propositions

Volume 3: Contains 42 propositions

The preface to the book, written by Wilbur Smith, is a telling introduction about the author and this work:

“While this work...may well be called the most exhaustive, thoroughly annotated and logically arranged study of Biblical prophecy that appeared in our country during the nineteenth century, its author lived and worked in an oblivion that seems almost mysterious, and experienced so little recognition at the time of the publication of his work that one must almost believe that there was an organized determination to ignore its appearance.”

So little is known about George N.H. Peters. He was born November 30, 1825, in New Berlin, PA. At the age of ten, he moved with his family to Springfield, where he later graduated from Wittenberg College in Springfield, Ohio, in 1850. Surviving manuscripts indicate Peters wrote many books¹, all written in longhand, which include, expositions of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1st and 2nd Timothy, Titus, and Revelation. In addition, there are two other manuscripts on *The Lord's Supper* and *The Predicted Future*². But his major enduring work, a thirty-year endeavor³, is the subject at hand, *The Theocratic*

¹Thompson, Lolana. *Guide to George N.H. Peters Papers*. Archives, Dallas Theological Seminary. 2006.

² Stoll, John H. George N.H. Peters—A Biography. Printed in *The Theocratic Kingdom*.

³ Wilson, James Grant and Fiske, John. *Appletons Cyclopedia of American Biography*. D. Appleton and Company. New York. 1888. Pg. 741.

Kingdom, which is a massive, detailed study of Biblical prophecy and the coming Kingdom of Jesus Christ.⁴

He was extremely well read and how he was able to accomplish what he did in a non-digital age is extraordinary. An examination of the index reveals that he quoted over four thousand different authors, from the early church fathers down to the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

An obituary from the Springfield Morning Times for October 9, 1909, reads:

“Rev. George N.H. Peters, aged 84 years, died Thursday at 8 p.m. at the residence of his son Edward Peters, at the corner of Huron St. and Leffel Lane. Funeral Saturday at 1 p.m. from the residence. Burial at Fletcher Chapel.”

Though he was buried in the Peters family lot in Fletcher Chapel Cemetery, there is no stone for him there.

After his death, some new light fell upon his biography. In his Junior year of college, a diseased condition of his eyes, caused during his childhood years by an explosion of gunpowder, forced him to give up the college course. He was implored by physicians to *stop all labor or accept total blindness*. After medical treatment, he was able to continue and eventually graduate.

He had increased kidney troubles and advancing deafness which causes one to wonder how many young men would have given up and wallowed in their misery, but, as noted above, Peters graduated from the Seminary in 1850.

During his life, George Peters pastored Lutheran churches in several cities in Xenia, and Springfield, Ohio. While ministering in a church in Mansfield, Ohio, he met and married his wife, Caroline Hersheiser, and they had two sons, Edgar Edwards and Charles Cyrus. Their first son was born in 1854. Peters' next church was in Plymouth, Ohio, where their second son, was born. Peters served in many towns in Ohio, including Woodbury, where he was required to preach some of the time in German. Studying for these sermons strained his eyes, and physicians warned him to stop or risk total blindness.

Peters also spent a year in Omaha, Nebraska, where he had a general store and preached at times. From those who knew him well, it was said that he was the kindest and most generous person one could know. He generously extended credit, especially to Indians, but many customers never paid, and he returned to Ohio broke and

⁴ Kurian, George Thomas and Lamport Mark A. *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the United States*, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

disappointed in mankind. While in Nebraska, he helped organize the Nebraska Synod and maintained membership in it for several years. His last pastorate was at the First Lutheran Church in Springfield, Ohio. Peters was talented in many fields, including carpentry, farming, preaching, and writing.⁵

Peters adopted the views of Dr. S.S. Schmucker regarding the Lord's Supper (and perhaps others). Schmucker denied the *real presence in the Lord's Supper*, which put him outside the mainstream Lutheran camp. Schmucker held to a Calvinist view which would cause one to surmise that Peters held some or many Calvinist views himself. We will need to watch for clues regarding this as we read through *The Theocratic Kingdom*. Schmucker, however, was a pre-millennialist and is likely responsible for bringing Peters to the same position.

Peters, in his own introduction states (p. 15), "*Owing to providences which prevented the writer from actively prosecuting the ministry, he was directed to a course of study which influenced him years ago to draw up a draft of the present work.*"

There was great opposition from his fellow Lutherans who were post-millennial; they rejected his study regarding the Kingdom. Peters anticipated that opposition when he wrote, "*That this work will bring upon the author bitter and unrelenting abuse is almost inevitable...yet the simple fact is that if anyone dares to arise and call into question the correctness of popular views and propose another...his motive is assailed, his piety is doubted, his character is privately and publicly traduced...by persons who deem themselves set up for the defense of the truth* (pp. 18,20). In short, Peters experienced *deep disappointment and loneliness*, although he was happy and at ease living isolated.

Schmucker, and his proponents (which would evidently include Peters), were accused by fellow Lutheran ministers of being "open counterfeiters, Calvinists, Methodists, and Unionists...traitors and destroyers of the Lutheran Church".⁶

Due to the extreme opposition to his views, Peters was still blessed with the ability to read and study *with a faith and hope that gave comfort and endurance, and peace*. He spent great amounts of time studying, oftentimes eighteen to twenty hours per day for days at a time. Many nights he wrote all night long.⁷ During the last two months of his

⁵ Thompson, Lolana. *Guide to George N.H. Peters Papers*. Archives, Dallas Theological Seminary. 2006.

⁶ Bente, Friedrich (1919). *American Lutheranism*. Vol. 1. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House. p. 116.

⁷ Stoll, John H. George N.H. Peters—A Biography. Printed in *The Theocratic Kingdom*.

life, he was almost constantly confined to his room but was kindly cared for by his son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. They provided comfort and watched by his side until the end came on Thursday evening at eight o'clock, October 7, 1909.

Throughout the volumes, Peters addressed topics showing his prescient thinking, such as the resettling of Palestine and the restoration of the Land to the Jews, the critical attacks in the times leading up to the Millennium on the Scriptures and the Church, and the threat of world Communism.

In his Preface, Wilbur Smith cautions the reader on agreeing with every aspect of Peters' three-volume work, and in fact, identifies *three or four points that would be quite unacceptable to most careful students of these themes today*. We will watch for these proposed views throughout our study; among them are:

- The identification of the kings of the east of Revelation 16:12 with saints reigning with Christ on earth.
- A strange geographical location of the Mount of Megeddon.
- His entire geographical prophecy study.
- His lack of reference to Egypt, and Babylon.

Finally, it should be noted, and while we shouldn't attach any *guilt by association*, that Peters was called by Charles Taze Russell (founder of Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society, later, after his death, the Jehovah's Witnesses), "an acquaintance and a friend." It seems that while there was a friendship, they were not theologically aligned. Here is what Russell wrote in the May 1883 edition of Watch Tower:

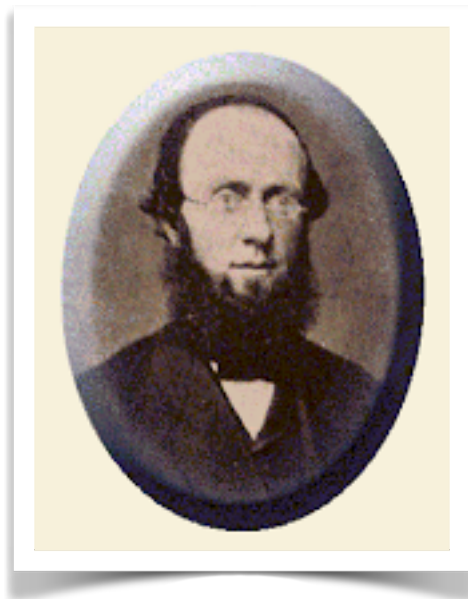
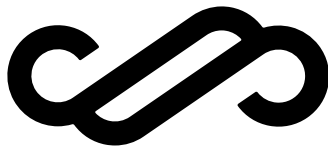
"Brother G. N. H. Peters, of Springfield, Ohio, is an old acquaintance and friend. He is a believer in the redemptive work of Christ, and hence a Christian brother. He is a believer in the future reign of Christ and the saints, for which cause sake he has suffered the loss of some things — some of the esteem of the nominal church. We regret to have it to state, however, that he is not free from Babylon's shackles, being yet identified with the Lutheran sect — hence has been hindered from a fuller development in grace and knowledge of the word and plan of God than if he stood in the full liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.

*Our brother has spent a large part of the past thirty years in preparing a very comprehensive work on Eschatology, entitled — —**THE THEOCRATIC KINGDOM.**" It treats of the kingdom of God to be established, from the standpoint known as "Premillenarian." It gives voluminous reports of the*

hundreds of views entertained on this subject — advocating in the main the so-called “Pre-millenarian” view. While the author does not ignore the teachings of the Apostles, he lays greater stress and value on the opinions of the “Fathers” (the Christian teachers of the first five centuries) than we could acknowledge as proper.

The work will comprise three volumes of about 600 pages each. The publisher says that the price should be \$5 per volume, but if sufficient orders — or promises at \$3 per volume — are received in advance to justify, then that will be the price.

While we cannot recommend it to you more than as above, to briefly state the facts and circumstances, yet if you should conclude to order it or a prospectus of it, you should address our brother and friend as above.”



George N.H. Peters
The only existing photograph?