

# The Bern Piscator Bible Edition of 1684

Nowhere else, other than in the Reformed Canton of Bern was the Piscator Bible so widely accepted and appreciated. Between 1684 and 1848 no less than 8 editions of the whole Bible, 20 of the New Testament, an edition of the Old Testament and 6 editions of the Psalms were published. The Duodez edition of 1846 – 1848 appears not only to have been the last Piscator Bible printed in Bern, but in the whole world as well.

How was it possible to replace the well known Zurich translation or the official Luther edition in Protestant Cantons with a translation by the theologically questionable Johannes Piscator from Herborn? In spite of intensive and extensive research, it has not been possible to completely answer this question.

Maybe the answer can be found in the refusal of the Canton of Bern to cooperate with Zürich on a newer, more modern translation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Bern felt that it was not advisable to limit the people's access to holy scripture by accepting only one translation for the whole Canton. After Zürich proceeded with a new edition of the wide-spread Zürich translation, Bern countered with the Piscator Bible in 1684. Another reason for Bern's action may have been the student contacts between Bern and Herborn where during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, at least 34 students from Bern were matriculated in Herborn. Family ties may also have played a role in the decision, since 2 grand children of Johannes Piscator had married influential Bernese. Along with this, Bern always regarded itself as the protector of the Reformed beliefs and reformed orthodoxy, and therefore choose an "unadulterated" Reformed edition.

Georg Thormann (1653-1716) was chosen as the printer in 1681, and was required by contract to print 6000 copies, 5000 in Folio and 1000 in Quart. The Government was to furnish the paper, and in order to have the copies available as soon as possible, the printing of the Apocrypha was done by another printer.

Since the original Piscator Bible was over 80 years old, and somewhat cumbersome to use by the average reader, several editorial changes had to be made by the local pastors. These editorial changes entailed theological questions, shorter teachings or lessons, and a more readable style. A new title page using allegoric scenes from the Bible, was included giving the reader the impression that he was about to enter into a deeper fellowship with God. Through their concentrated efforts, the Bernese government was able to produce a low priced Bible for the populace, which within a short time was to be found in all parts of the Canton.



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