

By Fire: The Jakob Hutter Story

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Jason Landsel's graphic biography *By Fire* is about the life and death of a radical religious reformer.

In 1525, in the European state of Tyrol, new taxes and a corrupt religious establishment spark dissent. After a failed attempt at revolution, Jakob Hutter and his friend Peter encounter a woman searching for an outlawed religious group, the Anabaptists. While Jakob decides to join the Anabaptists, Peter works as a spy, helping the authorities find and capture the group.

Jakob is a passionate hero who's charismatic in his resolve. However, it's Peter who narrates, magnifying his betrayal of Jakob and adding dramatic weight as Jakob and the Anabaptists seek refuge in Moravia. Life is good for a time, and Jakob becomes a community leader and marries. But when the pressure to stop the Anabaptists rises, Jakob is captured and faces torture and death. The communities he nurtured, known as Hutterite, survive into the future.

Pastel colors are used to capture the essence of Reformation-era Europe. Further, each chapter is introduced with an image that recalls iconic religious art. And the book's appendix includes maps, original letters, and a timeline to place Jakob's story into the larger context of European religious history.

By Fire is an inspiring graphic biography about a man who tried to change a religious status quo despite the cost to himself.

PETER DABBENE (January / February 2025)

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