

# The Terror Begins

by Jill Briscoe

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*Jill Briscoe's sermon emphasizes the resilience of faith in the face of persecution and the hope for renewal amidst adversity in Uganda.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 43:2, Romans 8:35, Hebrews 10:35, James 1:12, 1 Peter 4:12

**Topics:** "Persecution And Faith", "Enduring Hope"

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## Description

Jill Briscoe preaches about the unwavering faith and resilience of Bishop Festo in Uganda during a time of persecution under President Idi Amin Dada, drawing parallels to the biblical story of the fiery trials faced by early Christians. Despite the growing hatred and danger, Festo remains steadfast in his commitment to spreading the Gospel, likening the church to the grass that regrows after a fire, symbolizing the enduring nature of faith. As the persecution intensifies and people start disappearing, the message of hope and perseverance shines through, echoing Festo's belief that the church will emerge stronger than ever.

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## Transcript

Hark was happy to learn that Festo had married a nice teacher from his home village. Her name was Mera, and Festo loved her very much. Festo was a teacher, too. Wherever he went, he taught children about school subjects. He taught them about Jesus, too.

In 1963, Festo had become a full-time minister.<sup>8</sup> And now, after many years of serving the Lord, he was being made a Christian bishop in Uganda. That meant instead of serving one church in a town, he would serve many churches across the country!

Hark followed Bishop Festo whenever he preached.

"I like being in church," Hark announced one day as he settled into a pew. (No one could hear him, of course.) "Festo is a really good preacher!"

Festo stood before the people with a wide smile on his face. He was wearing a beautiful purple shirt. "Bishops always wear purple shirts," Hark noted in his report. He like the color. There was a lot of it in heaven.

Hark noticed a lot of boys and girls sitting in front of him. They were still and alert. Their little faces were turned toward Festo.

"Kids usually wiggle in church," Hark said to himself. "But they are holding still today!"

Festo told a story about his own childhood. ("Boys and girls always like to hear about when grownups were little," Hark noted with approval.)

"When I was a boy," said Festo, "I used to herd cattle on the wide, open grasslands. One day the sparks from a cooking fire were carried by the wind. They fell into the long, dry grass the cattle love to eat. In a moment everything was on fire!"

"Oh," whispered a little boy to his friend. "That's scary!"

"Sh-h-h," his sister said, poking him to be quiet.

"Everyone hoped the winds would blow the huge fire away from our huts. The roofs of our buildings were grass. Our homes would have caught fire in a minute, but they were saved. The winds blew the fire away from the village," he said.

"The next day, I went out to look at the grasslands. Everything was burned to the ground. The land looked black and dead," Festo said.

" 'Mother,' I cried, 'whatever will happen to our cattle now? There's nothing for them to eat. And the ground looks as if it will never grow grass again,' " he recalled.

" 'Wait a bit,' my mother answered. 'The rains will come. Then the grass will grow again, thicker than ever. The plains will turn green, and the cows will eat,' " Festo told the people.

"And she was right," he finished.

Then Festo got very serious. "Dear brothers and sisters, our church is about to be burned by the fires of hatred. But no fire can destroy the seeds of faith. Those who hate Christians may hurt us. But we will be like the grass that grows again, strong and thick, after the fire. The church in Uganda will keep growing, and soon we will be stronger than ever."<sup>9</sup>

Church was over. The people came out looking serious. They knew Festo had been warning them about the dangerous things that were starting to happen.

Uganda's new leader, President Idi Amin Dada, did not like Christians. He was like King Mwanga, who had tried so long ago to end the Christian faith in Uganda. Now the terror was happening again, as it had when King Mwanga's soldiers had burned to death the three Christian boys. This time it was President Amin leading a wave of hatred against those who loved Jesus.

Hark flew to the president's palace to see if he could find out any news. Flying around a corner of the palace, he came face to face with a huge man. Hark had never seen such a big man in all his life! He was even more shocked to realize he had very nearly bumped into President Amin! The giant man seemed to tower over all the other people around him.

First, Hark snapped a quick picture of the president. Then he dug in his heavenly backpack for a heavenly tape measure. He was glad President Amin couldn't see what he was doing. I don't think he'd take too kindly to my measuring him! Hark thought.

"He's six-feet, three-inches high, and very big around, too," Hark noted.

Hark's history book said Amin had taken control of Uganda in 1971. At first, everything seemed to go along all right. Things were more at ease in the country than before. But that only lasted a few months! Recently, Amin had told his soldiers they could arrest and execute anyone they thought might cause trouble!

"They don't even have to put them in prison and give them a trial," Hark said to himself. He was getting really worried. "Amin seems to be very frightened that someone will overthrow him. So he's letting his soldiers do anything they want!"

Hark traveled all over the city to see what was happening. A bird flying along with him said, "Come down to the army's secret huts. You should see all the new guns and bullets they are hiding there."

So Hark went to see them. Sure enough, piles and piles of weapons had been collected. "It must be costing a fortune," the bird said. Hark nodded his head sadly.

"President Amin is getting ready to fight someone," he said to his new friend. "And it doesn't look as though he cares how much money he spends doing it!"

Next, Hark walked along a row of houses. He visited some of them to see if he could learn anything more. Many of the people seemed to be very scared. Hark soon found out why.

"My daddy hasn't come home," a little boy was telling a friend. Big tears rolled down the boy's little black face. "He went to work a whole week ago. But he hasn't come back! Mommy doesn't know where he is. She's looked everywhere. We think the soldiers stole him.!"

In house after house, Hark heard the same story. People were disappearing right off the streets in broad daylight. A car would screech to a halt. Then men would jump out and grab someone. After they pushed the person into the car, they would zoom away. No one knew where they went.

It was terrifying. But this was just the beginning.

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