

Tribe of Judah Reaches Outlaw Bikers With Road-Tested Gospel

Ben Priest 'anointed' his Harley-Davidson with motor oil 21 years ago to consecrate his ministry, which today is international

Fueled by its mission to "reach the unreached, tell the untold and love the unloved," the Christian motorcycle ministry known as Tribe of Judah roars over highways and byways, reaching the outlaw biker world with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Based outside of Houston in Humble, Texas, the ministry includes more than 400 members in some 40 chapters worldwide, with international chapters located in Australia, England, Germany, Ireland, Norway and Sweden.

Leading the pack is Tribe of Judah founder and president Ben Priest. Saved from a life of drug addiction and hell-raising through the ministry of the Lakewood Church in Houston, Priest accepted Jesus Christ and was filled with the Holy Spirit in 1980.

Yearning for more of God, Priest promptly enrolled in the City of Light— Charles and Frances Hunter's one-year Bible school in Kingwood, Texas. After graduation, Priest said he sensed the call of God but was unclear about what to do.

While winning multitudes of people through personal evangelistic encounters Priest began to believe God was preparing him for an unusual ministry. Confirmation came when a woman told him that God had spoken to her in a dream and

told her to give him a classic 1950 Harley-Davidson Panhead motorcycle. A former outlaw biker, Priest readily acknowledged the gift as coming from the Lord and proceeded to pour a can of motor oil on the bike to anoint it for service in God's gang.

"In my search for the security of a family, I was now part of a real family of brothers and sisters. The Bible called it the tribe of Judah," Priest recalled.

Founded in 1981, Tribe of Judah shares its ministry headquarters with River of God Church, a now-600-member congregation Priest started in 1992 and still pastors today. The two ministries share eight full-time staff members, including Priest and his wife, Tammy.

Today, Priest's portable pulpit is a Harley-Davidson Road King, from which he sometimes conducts impromptu chapel services during biker meetings. Tribe of Judah members participate in more than 1,300 regional, national and international events a year, from swap meets to drag races to club rallies.

Spearheading the group's outreach to outlaw biker clubs is its championship drag-racing team. According to Priest, the success of the team has been vital in opening doors of ministry to the organization.

"We've had the leader of the largest outlaw biker-gang ask for prayer from us and accept one of our Bibles," Priest told Charisma. "We simply try to be there for people when the smoke clears and the dust settles. Religion paints a mean picture of God, so when bikers get in trouble they usually run from God

instead of to Him. Our goal has become loving them into the kingdom of God with unconditional love.”

Priest also has ministered at churches, schools, youth rallies, drug-rehabilitation centers and prisons nationwide. In addition, the media ministry of Tribe of Judah produces and distributes teaching videos, audio CDs and audiocassettes internationally.

The organization also publishes Outreach Update, a widely circulated quarterly magazine with the motto: “A Vehicle of God’s Love.”

The group’s ministry to outlaw biker-clubs has proved so successful that Priest said the FBI has authorized dossiers on Tribe of Judah members, trying to discover the secret of the ministry’s success in reaching outlaw bikers.

He said the ministry has come a long way from its early days when criticism came from all corners, including the body of Christ. But Priest once got some valuable advice from Kenneth Copeland, a member of Tribe of Judah.

“He told me to forget the religious critics and do what Jesus has given me to do,” Priest said. “He reminded me that we’re not here to reach the church.”

The ministry of Tribe of Judah is supported through donations, as there are no annual membership dues and the group does not sponsor membership-recruitment drives.

Said Priest: “We pray and believe God to support all that we

do.”

Sean Fowlds