

## Branhamism/William Branham

By Phillip Arnn

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**Founder:** William Marrion Branham

**Founding Date:** Branham's Healing Ministry began May, 1946.

**Official Publications:** The Voice of God Recordings, Inc. (formerly Spoken Word Publications), produces numerous books, tapes and tracts - mostly the messages of Branham.

**Organization Structure:** The William Branham Evangelistic Association; Branham Tabernacle; The Voice of God Recordings, Inc. About 100 small groups meet worldwide, but there is no official association of churches.

**Unique Terms:** Laodicean Church Age, Seventh Angel's message, Mark of the Beast.

### HISTORY

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William Marrion Branham was born April 6, 1909 in the mountains of Kentucky. He was the first of nine children. His father was a logger and their first home was a dirt floor log cabin. Branham was told by his mother that his birth was accompanied by a supernatural sign. He was born in the predawn morning. He was told that when the small window of the cabin was opened, that a light stood in the opening.<sup>1</sup>

Branham's life was intersected and influenced by numerous visions and angelic visitations. He recalled that at age seven, he heard a voice, "Well, I started up the lane again. And I turned to look at this again. And when it did, a human Voice just as audible as mine is, said, 'Don't you never drink, smoke, or defile your body in any way. There'll be a work for you to do when you get older.' Why, it liked to scared me to death!"<sup>2</sup> Branham recounted other audible communications and visions that imparted to him specific information concerning future events which later came to pass.

Branham was converted around the age of twenty and married Hope Brumbach. His conversion was a result of a series of visions occurring during and after a life threatening illness.<sup>3</sup>

In his early ministry, he came in contact with "Jesus-Only" Pentecostals. This sect broke away from the traditional Pentecostal movement, thus denying the doctrine of the Trinity. He attended one of their national conventions and was invited to preach. A number of their ministers invited him to conduct revivals in their churches. He returned home and informed his wife, "Oh, I met the cream of the crop. It's the best you ever seen. Them people ain't ashamed of their religion." Although he was persuaded not to continue the association by family and fellow ministers, Branham was greatly influenced by the "Jesus-Only" Pentecostal movement. He later adopted a number of their doctrinal views.

Branham's wife and baby daughter died in 1937 from tubercular meningitis. He felt that it was because he had not continued in fellowship with the Pentecostals and had missed God's will.

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In 1946, Branham received what he came to call his “charge” from the recurrent audible voice. While baptizing converts in the Ohio River, he claims it happened.

And just then a whirl come from the heavens above, and here come that Light, shining down.... and It hung right over where I was at. A Voice spoke from there, and said, “As John the Baptist was sent for the forerunner of the first coming of Christ, you’ve got a... have a Message that will bring forth the forerunner of the Second Coming of Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

Not long after the commission as the forerunner of the second coming of Christ, Branham was visited by an angel. He was told that he was being given two ministry gifts. He would receive the gift of healing and the gift of the “word of knowledge.” Branham came to believe that this angel was the source of all his visions. Branham inquired of the angel why he should believe he was an angel of God. The angel told him that the religious leaders of Christ’s day had called Jesus a devil. He should not worry about the opposition from family and fellow ministers. Branham had been told by fortune-tellers in impromptu meetings that he had a special gift of God and was born under a sign. The angel assured him that even devils had confirmed that Jesus was the Christ and not to be concerned by the testimony of fortune-tellers.<sup>5</sup>

The next Sunday Branham’s first challenge, a woman dying with cancer, was brought before him. Just as the angel had said, he had a vision and prayed for the woman. She was healed. His fame spread far and wide.<sup>6</sup> From that time forward, Branham claimed the angel was with him night and day. He stated that he was unable to minister unless the angel was at his side.<sup>7</sup>

Branham was a poorly educated man and had no formal Bible education. His ministry was proclaimed with alleged supernatural manifestations and empowered by a spirit being.

## DOCTRINE

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**Trinity:** Like the “Jesus-Only” Pentecostals, Branham denied the Trinity doctrine, teaching a form of Modalism. Instead of three Persons in the Godhead, Branham taught that there was only one Person (Jesus) going under different titles or modes at various times in history.

Branham’s teaching is a variation of a second century heresy taught by Sabellius known as Modalistic Monarchianism or Patripassianism.<sup>8</sup> Branham explained, “...not one place in the Bible is trinity ever mentioned...It’s Catholic error and you Protestants bow to it.”<sup>9</sup> “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is offices of one God. He was the Father; He was the Son; He is the Holy Ghost. It’s three offices or three dispensations...”<sup>10</sup> This view of the Godhead is called Modalism and has been held to be heretical by both Catholic and Protestant churches.

**Baptism:** Branham claimed that proper baptism was needed to avoid the “Mark of the Beast” of denominational churches and escape the danger of missing the rapture and entering the Tribulation. Proper baptism must be in the name of Jesus only. Baptism with the Trinitarian formula of Matthew 28:18 (“in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”) is unacceptable to God.

Branham explained,

There never was a person baptized in the name of ‘Father, Son, Holy Ghost’ until early Catholic church.”<sup>11</sup> “Look down on your Bible and see if that says ‘in the names of...’ Does it? No, sir... It said, ‘in the NAME...’” Branham attempted to explain the distinction, “You see, you misunderstand it then. It’s one God in three

dispensations.... And when He said, 'Go baptize them in the Name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit,' it was Jesus Christ. And that's why we baptize in Jesus' Name.<sup>12</sup>

If an incorrect formula was spoken during baptism, Branham felt the convert would go into darkness. "But a tritheist, triune baptism was never recognized in the Church, the New Testament... Now you know what to do, that's right; and if you refuse to walk in Light when Light's brought forth, you turn to darkness. Right! Amen!"<sup>13</sup>

**Serpent's Seed:** Branham taught that Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) was sexual in nature. According to Branham, Eve was seduced into a sexual relationship with the serpent and became pregnant with Cain. He explained,

Here is what actually happened in the Garden of Eden. The Word says that Eve was beguiled by the serpent. She was actually seduced by the serpent. He was as close to being a human that his seed could, and did mingle with that of the woman and cause her to conceive.<sup>14</sup>

The serpent's seed was Cain and all his descendants. They are predestined for Hell. The Godly seed is Seth and his descendants who have been revealed by their call to Branham's ministry. A third group, represented by those still in denominational churches have free will to choose Heaven or Hell. The Godly seed are the Bride of Christ and will be raptured before Tribulation. Denominations are or eventually will be the Mark of the Beast and those who remain therein will go through the Tribulation.<sup>15</sup>

**Last Days Prophet:** Branham's followers claim that he held a special role as God's uniquely empowered end-time prophet. "Now, I'm just your brother, by the grace of God. But when the Angel of the Lord moves down, it becomes then a Voice of God to you...But I am God's Voice to you... Now, see, I can say nothing in myself. But what He shows me."<sup>16</sup> The angelic visitor told Branham that he would be given two gifts and that he would restore Bible truth.

Branham's followers identified him as the prophetic Elijah of Malachi 4 and the seventh angel of Revelation 10. Speaking of himself, Branham said,

...we are promised a return of that Spirit [Elijah] just before the end-time. He won't start another church, because there is no more church ages to come... because the Laodicea Church Age is the last age, and the messenger of the Seventh Angel,... is the fellow that is going to reveal, by the Holy Spirit, all of these mysterious things.... Notice. This last message of the last church age is not a reformer, he is a PROPHET!<sup>17</sup>

According to his disciples, Branham is not just a prophet but a major prophet. "A MAN SENT FROM GOD. That the ministry of William Branham qualifies to be that of a major prophet and thus fulfill Malachi 4, 5 and 6 and Revelation 10:7 should become abundantly clear to any who take time to conduct even a brief investigation..."<sup>18</sup>

## BIBLICAL RESPONSE

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**Trinity:** The Trinity doctrine cannot be fully comprehended by finite man. However, any other view of the Godhead will not satisfy God's self revelation in Scripture. Modalism teaches that there is only one Person in the Godhead functioning through relational "modes." When He is in the Father mode, the Son and Spirit modes are not functional. In Matthew 3:13-17, however, the Son is baptized, the Spirit descends and the Father speaks. Also, "in the name of" (Matthew 28:19) or in the authority of does not limit the nature of God's unity to one Person but connotes equality of essence within the Godhead (2 Corinthians 13:14).

**Baptism:** Baptism in the name of Jesus only may have been the early practice in the Jerusalem church. However, all manuscripts of Matthew 28:19 have the Trinitarian formula as being commissioned by Jesus. One document, dating from A.D. 60, the Didache, prescribes the Matthew formula (Father, Son and Holy Ghost) for baptism within the church. Regardless of the formula, baptism is not a requirement for being raptured or avoiding the Tribulation. Full salvation is by grace through faith and not of works such as baptism (Ephesians 2:8-9).

**Serpent's Seed:** The Serpent's Seed doctrine is an improper interpretation of Genesis 3 that is allegorical and arbitrary. Eve's sin was not sexual. She partook of literal fruit from a literal tree. Adam also partook of the same fruit as Eve (Genesis 3:6). This is not a reference to sexual sin. The Serpent's Seed doctrine artificially limits the atonement by race or genetics. While it is true that most of humanity will not benefit from the sacrificial death of Christ (Matthew 7:13-14), Jesus died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). Christ's atonement is not limited to a certain family or race of people.

The Serpent's Seed doctrine did not originate with Branham. Branham's version of the doctrine parallels the racist views of some groups within the Identity movement and the speculative philosophies of Sun Myung Moon.

**Last Days Prophet:** In light of claims that Branham was God's end-time prophet, it is significant that he falsely predicted that America would be destroyed in 1977.<sup>19</sup> Branham was guilty of false prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). While he tried to call it a prediction rather than a prophecy (without explaining the difference), he firmly stressed that the 1977 date was based on his thirty year study of the Bible and "Divine inspiration." Branham's ministry and claims were supported by alleged supernatural verification. Signs and wonders, however, are not infallible proofs. Many conflicting sects and ideologies boast similar subjective "proofs" (2 Thessalonians 2:9, Matthew 12:39, 24:24, Hebrews 1:1, 1 John 4:1-3).

## RECOMMENDED READING

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*Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity* by Gregory A. Boyd. This work focuses on the movement which greatly influenced William Branham. The issues of Modalism, the One Name, baptismal regeneration and others are examined. 234 pages.

*God in Three Persons* by E. Calvin Beisner. Beisner examines the historic roots of and biblical evidences for the Trinity doctrine. Included in Beisner's work is a refutation of Modalism. 160 pages.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> William Branham, "Brother Branham", 21, taped sermon transcript
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., 24.
- <sup>3</sup> *Acts of the Prophet*, 40-43.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., 71.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., 74, 75, 79.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., 80.
- <sup>7</sup> *Occult Bondage and Deliverance*, 49, 50.
- <sup>8</sup> *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, "Monarchianism."
- <sup>9</sup> *Conduct, Order, Doctrine Q and A*, 182.

- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 392.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 178.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 181, 184.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., 190
- <sup>14</sup> *The Original Sin*, 2, 3.
- <sup>15</sup> *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 96.
- <sup>16</sup> *Footprints on the Sands of Time*, 214.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Seven Seals*, 144, 145.
- <sup>18</sup> *The Message*, (Bible Believers Incorporated), 7.
- <sup>19</sup> *The Seven Church Ages*, 322.



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