

An Evangelical Analysis of the Life and Teachings of William Branham

Biography:

1. **Early Life and Mysticism (1909–1931)** William Marrion Branham was born on April 6, 1909, in a dirt-floor log cabin in Cumberland County, Kentucky. He was the first of ten children born to Charles and Ella Branham. **Poverty and Hardship:** His family was deeply impoverished. His father was an alcoholic, which contributed to a difficult and traumatic childhood. **Early Visions:** Branham claimed to have experienced supernatural phenomena from a very young age. He famously recounted a story where, as a young boy, a voice spoke to him from a whirlwind in a tree, telling him: "Don't you never drink, smoke, or defile your body in any way, for there'll be a work for you to do when you get older."
2. **Conversion:** After a near-death experience in a hospital (where he claimed to see a vision of hell), he dedicated his life to God. He was originally ordained as a Baptist minister but soon felt alienated by denominational structures.
3. **The Angelic Commission & The Healing Revival (1946–1955).** Branham is widely credited with initiating the healing revivals that swept across America in the late 1940s and early 1950s.
4. **The Visitation:** In May 1946, Branham claimed an angel appeared to him in a cave, commissioning him to take a gift of divine healing to the peoples of the world. He said the angel gave him two "signs" to validate his ministry:
Vibration in the hand: A physical reaction in his hand that allowed him to detect diseases. **Discernment of hearts:** The ability to reveal the secret sins and thoughts of individuals on the prayer line (often compared to the word of knowledge).
5. **Rise to Fame:** His meetings grew exponentially, filling stadiums and tents. He travelled globally, and his success inspired dozens of other evangelists (such as Oral Roberts and T.L. Osborn) to launch their own healing ministries. This era is often called the "Latter Rain" movement.
3. **Shift to Teaching and Controversy (1955–1965).** By the mid-1950s, the healing revival began to

wane. Branham shifted his focus from praying for the sick to teaching deep, often controversial theological doctrine. He claimed these teachings were revealed to him directly by God and were necessary to restore the church before the Second Coming.

Key Controversial Teachings:

1. **The Serpent Seed:** The belief that the original sin in the Garden of Eden was sexual in nature—specifically that Eve had sexual intercourse with the Serpent, producing Cain. He taught that Cain's descendants were a literal "seed of the serpent" present in humanity to this day.
2. **Denominationalism:** He taught that denominational churches (Baptist, Methodist, Assemblies of God, etc.) were the "Mark of the Beast."
3. **Oneness Theology:** He rejected the traditional Christian doctrine of the Trinity, teaching a form of Modalism (God is one person who reveals Himself in three modes: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).
4. **The Prophet Elijah:** Branham (and his followers) came to believe he was the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5—the end-time "Elijah" sent to restore the hearts of the children to the apostolic fathers.
5. **Death and Legacy:** On December 18, 1965, Branham was involved in a head-on car collision near Amarillo, Texas. He died from his injuries on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1965.
6. **The Message:** Unlike many other evangelists whose movements faded or merged into mainstream Pentecostalism, Branham left behind a devoted group of followers who refer to his sermons as "The Message."
7. **Enduring Influence:** While mainstream evangelical and Pentecostal denominations largely reject his later theology as heretical, he remains a hero to many for his role in the healing revivals. There are an estimated two million believers worldwide who still follow his specific teachings today.

Summary of Ministry:

1933–1946 Local Pastor Pastored the "Branham Tabernacle" in Jeffersonville, Indiana; worked as a game warden.

1946–1955 Evangelist, Massive healing campaigns; verified miracles; inter-denominational unity.

1955–1965 Teacher/Prophet, with Focus on doctrines of "Serpent Seed"; claim to be the End Time Messenger; separation from denominations.

Teachings:

From a standard Evangelical perspective, the teachings of William Branham (1909–1965) present significant theological challenges. While Branham was a major figure in the post-WWII healing revivals, his later theology diverged sharply from historic Christian orthodoxy.

Evangelical apologetics focuses on comparing specific teachings against the final authority of the Bible (Sola Scriptura). Below is an apologetic outline refuting the core tenets of Branhamism (often referred to by followers as "The Message") from a traditional Evangelical standpoint.

1. The Sufficiency of Scripture vs. "The Voice"

Evangelicalism holds to Sola Scriptura—that the Bible is the sole infallible rule of faith and practice and that the canon of Scripture is closed.

Branham's Teaching: Branham claimed to be the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5-6 (the End Time Elijah) and the "angel" of the seventh church age (Revelation 3:14, 10:7). He taught that his taped sermons were Scripture interpreted and that one could not fully understand the Bible without his specific "vindicated" ministry.

The Evangelical Refutation:

Sufficiency: Hebrews 1:1-2 states, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken

to us by his Son." The revelation of God is complete in Christ and the Apostles' witness (Jude 1:3).

The Warning: Galatians 1:8 warns that "even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed." By adding necessary extra-biblical revelation, Branham's teachings undermine the sufficiency of the Bible.

2. The Doctrine of the Trinity

The Doctrine of the Trinity is considered a primary essential of the Christian faith by Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians alike.

Branham's Teaching: Branham vehemently rejected the Trinity, frequently calling it a "Catholic doctrine" and even "of the devil." He taught a variation of Modalism (similar to Oneness Pentecostalism), believing that God is one person who displayed himself in three "modes" or "masks" (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) at different times, rather than three co-equal, co-eternal Persons.

The Evangelical Refutation:

Biblical Distinctions: In the Gospels, the Father speaks to the Son (Mark 1:11), and the Son prays to the Father (John 17). This is impossible if they are the exact same person; it requires a distinction of persons within one Godhead.

The Atonement: If there is no distinction between Father and Son, the Atonement collapses. The Father sent the Son to be the propitiation for sin (1 John 4:10). Standard theology argues that to deny the Trinity is to deny the specific God revealed in the New Testament.

3. The "Serpent Seed" Doctrine

Perhaps the most controversial of Branham's teachings is his interpretation of Original Sin.

Branham's Teaching: He taught that the fall of man was sexual in nature. He claimed Eve had sexual intercourse with the Serpent (interpreted as a missing link creature), resulting in the birth of Cain. Consequently, he taught that there

are two lines of humanity: the seed of God (via Seth) and the seed of the Serpent (via Cain).

The Evangelical Refutation:

Scriptural Evidence: Genesis 4:1 explicitly states, "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain." The Bible attributes Cain's paternity directly to Adam, not a serpent.

Nature of Sin: The Evangelical view is that sin is a moral and spiritual rebellion (disobedience), not a genetic substance passed through a specific bloodline.

Gnostic Roots: This teaching closely mirrors ancient Gnostic heresies that viewed the physical body/reproduction as inherently evil, which contradicts the biblical view that God created marriage and reproduction as "good" (Genesis 1:28, 1:31).

4. The Test of a Prophet (Deuteronomy 18)

Evangelicals believe that while the gift of prophecy may exist (depending on one's view of cessationism), any claim to canonical, "Thus Saith the Lord" authority must be tested by 100% accuracy.

Branham's Claims: Branham claimed to speak with the authority of God. He made several specific predictions regarding the end of the world and geopolitical events.

The Evangelical Refutation:

The 1977 Prediction: Branham predicted that by 1977, the world systems would terminate and the Millennium would likely begin. He stated, "I predict that this will all happen between right now, 1933, and 1977." The continuation of the world past 1977 marks this as a false prophecy under the biblical standard.

Deuteronomy 18:22: "When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken." For an Evangelical, one failed prophecy disqualifies a prophet from holding biblical authority.

5. Soteriology (Salvation)

Branham's Teaching: Branham placed heavy emphasis on strict dress codes (especially for women), hair length, and adherence to his specific "Message" as evidence of being the "Bride of Christ." He often implied that those in denominational churches had taken the "Mark of the Beast."

The Evangelical Refutation:

Salvation by Grace: Ephesians 2:8-9 affirms salvation is by grace through faith, not by works or adherence to a specific modern prophet's cultural codes.

The Church Universal: Evangelicals believe the "Bride of Christ" is composed of all true believers across all denominations who trust in Jesus, not just a small group adhering to the teachings of a mid-20th-century figure.

Summary

While William Branham was a gifted speaker who drew attention to divine healing, his doctrinal legacy deviates from Christianity in matters of the Godhead (Trinity), Anthropology (Serpent Seed), and Authority (Sola Scriptura). From an Evangelical position, these are not minor disagreements but fundamental errors that place his teachings outside the bounds of biblical orthodoxy.

An Analysis of Miracles Claimed by William Braham and His Followers

The authenticity of William Branham's miracles is a subject of intense debate, divided largely between the faith-based narratives of his followers ("Message Believers") and historical or scientific scrutiny.

The following analysis breaks down his most famous supernatural claims against available historical and scientific evidence.

1. The "Halo" Photograph (Houston, 1950)

The Claim: A photograph taken during a debate in Houston, Texas, shows a supernatural ring of light above Branham's head. Branham claimed that George J. Lacy, whom he identified as the "head of the FBI fingerprint and document

department," authenticated the negative as supernatural and the only scientifically verified supernatural being in history.

The Authenticity Analysis:

FBI Employment: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests have confirmed that George J. Lacy was never employed by the FBI. He was a private freelance document examiner and former police officer.

Scientific Explanation: Critics and photographers suggest the "halo" was likely a lens flare or floodlight reflection from the indoor arena lights, a common occurrence in photography of that era.

Verdict: The appeal to FBI authority was false. While the negative may not have been "doctored" (i.e., double-exposed), the interpretation of the light as a supernatural entity relies entirely on faith, not the claimed government verification.

2. The Supernatural Cloud (Flagstaff, 1963)

The Claim: Branham claimed that on February 28, 1963, he was hunting on Sunset Mountain when seven angels appeared to him, creating a massive ring-shaped cloud 26 miles high. This event is central to his teaching on the "Seven Seals."

The Authenticity Analysis:

Meteorological Evidence: The cloud was real and was published in Life Magazine. However, scientific consensus (including reports from Dr. James McDonald) identified it as the debris field from a Thor rocket detonated at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California earlier that day. The wind drift calculations perfectly matched the cloud's position over Flagstaff.

Timeline Contradiction: Branham claimed he was standing directly under the cloud when it formed. However, the cloud appeared on February 28, but Branham's own hunting license and other records place him in Tucson (200 miles away) on that date. He did not arrive at the hunting camp until March 6, a week after the cloud had already dissipated.

Verdict: The physical cloud was a man-made event (rocket debris). Branham retroactively wove the event into his personal narrative, despite the geographic and chronological impossibilities.

3. Miraculous Healings

The Claim: Branham was credited with raising the dead and healing thousands of verified cases. He often used a "word of knowledge" to reveal secrets about a person's life (names, addresses, illnesses) to build faith for the healing.

The Authenticity Analysis:

The "Prayer Card" System: To manage crowds, attendees were given "prayer cards" with numbers. They would write their name, address, and ailment on these cards. Critics point out that this information was available to Branham's team, allowing for "hot reading"—relaying information already known rather than supernaturally revealed.

Specific Case Failures:

Donny Morton: A famous case where Branham pronounced a young child "healed" with a "Thus Saith The Lord." The child's family later confirmed that despite the pronouncement, the child died shortly after.

Congressman William Upshaw: Upshaw, a politician known for using his disability in his public image, was famously "healed" after being bedridden for years. However, historical records show Upshaw was active and campaigning during the years he was allegedly "bedridden." He died less than two years after the healing.

Alfred Pohl's Testimony: Rev. Alfred Pohl, who worked as an usher in Branham's meetings, eventually left the movement. He testified that he personally checked on many people Branham pronounced "healed" and found that they had died or remained sick shortly after the meetings.

4. The Hand Vibration ("The First Sign")

The Claim: Branham claimed he could detect diseases by holding a person's hand, which would cause his own hand to turn red and vibrate violently until the disease was cast out.

The Authenticity Analysis:

Subjective Nature: Unlike a photograph, this sign was entirely subjective. Only Branham could feel the vibration.

Medical Explanation: Skeptics attribute this to muscle fasciculation (voluntary or stress-induced twitching) or a psychosomatic effect. There is no medical mechanism by which a virus or bacteria in another person could cause a physical vibration in a third party's hand.

Summary Conclusion

While William Branham undoubtedly possessed a charismatic ability to inspire faith, historical and forensic investigation fails to validate the claimed miracles. The "scientific" proofs he cited (FBI validation, the Cloud) are contradicted by government records and meteorological data. The healing ministry, when audited by contemporaries like Alfred Pohl, showed a high rate of failure that was often omitted from the publicized success stories.