William M. Branham (April 6, 1909 – December 24, 1965) was an American Christian minister and faith healer who initiated the post–World War II healing revival. He left a lasting impact on televangelism and the modern Charismatic movement and is recognized as the “principal architect of restorationist thought” for Charismatics by some Christian historians. At the time they were held, his inter-denominational meetings were the largest religious meetings ever held in some American cities. Branham was the first American deliverance minister to successfully campaign in Europe; his ministry reached global audiences with major campaigns held in North America, Europe, Africa, and India.

Branham claimed to have received an angelic visitation on May 7, 1946, commissioning his worldwide ministry and launching his campaigning career in mid-1946. His fame spread rapidly as crowds were drawn to his stories of angelic visitations and reports of miracles happening at his meetings. His ministry spawned many emulators and set in motion the broader healing revival that later became the modern Charismatic movement. From 1955, Branham’s campaigning and popularity began to decline as the Pentecostal churches began to withdraw their support from the healing campaigns for primarily financial reasons. By 1960, Branham transitioned into a teaching ministry.

Unlike his contemporaries, who followed doctrinal teachings known as the Full Gospel tradition, Branham developed an alternate theology that was primarily a mixture of Calvinist and Arminian doctrines, and had a heavy focus on dispensationalism and Branham’s own unique eschatological views. While widely accepting the restoration doctrine he espoused during the healing revival, his divergent post-revival teachings were deemed increasingly controversial by his Charismatic and Pentecostal contemporaries, who subsequently disavowed many of the doctrines as “revelatory madness.” Many of his followers, however, accepted his sermons as oral scripture and refer to his teachings as The Message. In 1963, Branham preached a sermon in which he indicated he was a prophet with the anointing of Eliah, which had come to herald Christ’s second coming. Some followers of his teachings placed him at the center of a cult of personality during his final years. Branham claimed to have made over one million converts during his career. His teachings continue to be promoted through the William Branham Evangelistic Association, who reported in 2018 that about two million people receive their material. Branham died following a car accident in 1965.

Early life
William M. Branham was born near Burkesville, Kentucky, on April 6, 1909, the son of Charles and Ella Harvey Branham, the oldest of ten children. He claimed that at his birth, “a Light come [out] whirling through the window, about the size of a pillow, and circled around where I was, and went down on the bed.” Branham told his publicist Gordon Lindsey that he had mystical experiences from an early age, and that at age three he heard a “voice” speaking to him from a tree telling him “He would live near a city called New Albany.” According to Branham, that year his family moved to Jeffersonville, Indiana. Branham also said that when he was seven years old, God told him to avoid smoking and drinking alcoholic beverages. Branham stated he never violated the command.

Branham’s father was an alcoholic, and he grew up in “deep poverty” much like their neighbors. As a child, he would often wear a coat held closed only by safety pins, without a shirt underneath. Branham’s neighbors reported him as “someone who always seemed a little different”, but said he was a dependable youth. His tendency towards “mystical experiences and moral purity” caused misunderstandings among his friends, family, and other young people; he was a “black sheep” from an early age. Branham called his childhood “a terrible life.”

At 19, Branham left home seeking a better life. He traveled to Phoenix, Arizona, where he worked for two years on a ranch and began a successful career in boxing. He returned to Jeffersonville when his brother died in 1929. Branham had no experience with religion as a child; he said the first time he heard a prayer was at his brother’s funeral. Soon after, while working for the Public Service Company of Indiana, Branham was almost killed when he was overcome by gas. While recovering from the accident, he said he again heard a voice leading him to begin seeking God. He began attending a local Independent Baptist church, the First Pentecostal Baptist Church of Jeffersonville, where he converted to Christianity. Six months later he was ordained as an Independent Baptist minister. His early ministry was an “impressive success”; he quickly attracted a small group of followers, who helped obtain a tent in which he could hold a revival.

At the time of his conversion, the First Pentecostal Baptist Church of Jeffersonville was a nominally Baptist church that observed some Pentecostal doctrines, including divine healing. As a result, he may have been exposed to some Pentecostal teachings from his conversion. He was first exposed to a Pentecostal denominational church in 1936, which invited him to join, but he refused.

During June 1933, Branham held revival meetings in his tent. On June 2 that year, the Jeffersonville Evening News said the Branham campaign reported 14 converts. His followers believed his ministry was accompanied by miraculous signs from its beginning, and that when he was baptizing converts on June 11, 1933 in the Ohio River near Jeffersonville, a bright light descended over him and that he heard a voice say, “As John the Baptist was sent to forerun the first coming of Jesus Christ, so your message will forerun His second coming”. Belief in the baptismal story is a critical element of faith among Branham’s followers. Branham initially interpreted this in reference to the restoration of the gifts of the spirit to the church and made regular references to the baptismal story from the earliest days of the healing revival. In later years, Branham also connected the story to his teaching ministry. Baptist historian Doug Weaver said Branham may have embellished the baptismal story when he was achieving success in the healing revival.

Following his June tent meeting, Branham’s supporters helped him organize a new church, the Branham Tabernacle, in Jeffersonville. Branham served as pastor from 1933 to 1946. The church flourished at first but its growth began to slow. Because of the Great Depression it was often short of funds, so Branham served without compensation. Branham believed the stagnation of the church’s growth was a punishment from God for his failure to embrace Pentecostalism. Branham married Amelia Hope Blumbach (b. July 16, 1913) in 1934, and they had two children; William “Billy” Paul Branham (b. September 13, 1935) and Sharon Rose Branham (b. October 27, 1936). Branham’s wife died on July 22, 1937, and their daughter died four days later (July 26, 1937), shortly after the Ohio River flood of 1937. Branham interpreted their deaths as God’s punishment for his continued resistance to holding revivals for the Oneness Pentecostals.

Branham married Meda Marie Broy in 1941, and together they had three children; Rebekah (b. 1946), Sarah (b. 1950), and Joseph (b. 1955).

Healing revival
Background
Branham is known for his role in the healing revivals that occurred in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s, and most participants in the movement regarded him as its architect. Christian writer John Crowder described the period of revivals as “the most extensive public display of miraculous power in modern history”. Some, like Christian author and countercult activist Hank Hanegraaff, rejected the entire healing revival as a hoax and condemned the evangelical and Charismatic movements as cults. Divine healing is a tradition and belief that was historically held by a majority of Christians but it became increasingly associated with Evangelical Protestantism. The fascination of most of American Christianity with divine healing played a significant role in the popularity and inter-denominational nature of the revival movement.
Early campaigns

Branham held his first meetings as a faith healer in 1946. His healing services were well documented, and he is regarded as the pacesetter for those who followed him. At the time they were held, Branham’s revival meetings were the largest religious meetings some American cities he visited had ever seen; reports of 1,000 to 1,500 converts per meeting were common. Historians name his June 1946 St. Louis meetings as the inauguration of the healing revival period. He said he had received an angelic visitation on May 7, 1946, commissioning his worldwide ministry. In his later years, in an attempt to link his ministry with the end time, he connected his vision with the establishment of the nation of Israel, at one point mistakenly stating the vision occurred on the same day.

His first revival meetings were held 12 days prior to June 14, 1946. His first campaign manager, W. E. Kidston, was editor of The Apostolic Herald and had many contacts in the Pentecostal movement. Kidston was instrumental in helping organize Branham’s early revival meetings. Time magazine reported on his St. Louis campaign meetings, and according to the article, Branham drew a crowd of over 4,000 sick people who desired healing and recorded him diligently praying for each. Branham’s fame began to grow as a result of the public attention. During the early 1947, a major campaign was held in Kansas City, Missouri. Branham launched a tour of small, unnesses Pentecostal churches across the Midwest and southern United States, from which stemmed reports of healing and one report of a resurrection. By August his fame had spread widely. He held meetings that month in Jonesboro, Arkansas and drew a crowd of 25,000 with attendees from 28 different states. The size of the crowds presented a problem for Branham’s team as they found it difficult to find venues that could seat large numbers of attendees.

Branham’s revivals were interracial from their inception and were noted for their “racial openness” during the period of widespread racial unrest. An African American minister participating in the St. Louis meetings claimed to be healed by the revival, helping to bring Branham a sizable African American following from the early days of the revival. Dedicated to ministering to both races, Branham insisted on holding interracial meetings even in the southern states. To satisfy segregation laws which prevented him from ministering in the south, Branham’s team would use a rope to divide the crowd by race.

After holding a very successful inter-denominational meeting in Shreveport during mid-1947, Branham began assembling an evangelical team that stayed with him for most of the revival period. The first addition to the team was Jack Moore and Young Brown, who periodically assisted him in managing his meetings. Following the Shreveport meetings, Branham held a series of meetings in San Antonio, Texas, in late 1947. In January 1948, meetings were held in Florida. F. F. Bosworth met Branham at the meetings and also joined his team. Bosworth was among the pre-eminent ministers of the Pentecostal movement and lent great weight to Branham’s campaign team. He remained a strong Branham supporter until his death in 1958. Branham’s success publicist and manager for Branham, and played a key role in helping him gain national and international recognition.

In 1948, Branham and Lindsay founded Voice of Healing magazine, which was originally aimed at reporting Branham’s healing campaigns. Lindsay was impressed with Branham’s focus on humility and unity, and was instrumental in helping him gain acceptance among Trinitarian and Oneness Pentecostal groups by expanding his revival meetings beyond the United Pentecostal Church to include all of the major Pentecostal groups.

The first meetings organized by Lindsay were held in northeastern North America during late 1947. At the first of these meetings, held in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canadian minister Ern Baxter joined Branham’s team. Lindsay reported 70,000 attendees to the 14 days of meetings and long prayer lines as Branham prayed for the sick. William Hawlin, a Canadian Pentecostal minister, attended one of Branham’s Vancouver meetings in November 1947 and was impressed by Branham’s healings. Branham thus became an influence on the Latter Rain revival movement, which Hawlin helped initiate. In January 1948, meetings were held in Florida. F. F. Bosworth met Branham at the meetings and also joined his team. Bosworth was among the pre-eminent ministers of the Pentecostal movement and lent great weight to Branham’s campaign team. He remained a strong Branham supporter until his death in 1958. Branham’s success publicist and manager for Branham, and played a key role in helping him gain national and international recognition.

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In the first part of his meetings, one of Branham’s companion evangelists would preach a sermon. Ern Baxter or F. F. Bosworth usually filled this role, but other ministers also participated in Branham’s campaigns. Baxter generally focused on bible teaching; Bosworth counseled supplicants on the need for faith and the divine healing. Following their build-up, Branham would take the podium and deliver a short sermon, in which he usually related stories about his personal life experiences. After completing his sermon, he would proceed with a prayer line where he would pray for the sick. Branham would often request God “to confirm his message with two-or-three faith inspired miracles”. His campaign manager organized the prayer line, sending supplicants forward to be prayed for on stage individually. Branham generally prayed for a few people each night and believed witnessing the results on the stage would inspire faith in the audience and permit them to experience similar results without having to be personally prayed for. Describing Branham’s method, Bosworth said “he does not begin to pray for the healing of the afflicted in body in the healing line each night until God animates him for the operation of the gift, and until he is conscious of the presence of the Angel with him on the platform. Without this consciousness he seems to be perfectly helpless.”

Branham told audiences the angel that commissioned his ministry had given him two signs by which they could prove his commission. He described the first sign as vibrations he felt in his hand when he touched a sick person’s hand, which communicated to him the nature of the illness, but did not guarantee healing. Branham’s use of what his fellow evangelists called a word of knowledge, gift separated him from his contemporaries. This second sign did not appear in his campaigns until after his recovery in 1948, and was used to “amaze tens of thousands” at his meetings. According to Bosworth, this gift of knowledge allowed Branham “to see and enable him to tell the many events of [people’s] lives from their childhood down to the present”. This caused many in the healing revival to view Branham as a “seer like the old testament prophets”. Branham amazed even fellow evangelists, which served to further push him into a legendary status in the movement. Branham’s audiences were often astounded by the events during his meetings. At the peak of his popularity in the 1950s, Branham was widely adored and “the neo-Pentecostal world believed Branham to be a prophet to their generation”.

Branham faced criticism and opposition from the early years of the healing campaign. According to historian Ronald Kydd, Branham evoked strong opinions from people with whom he came into contact, “most people either loved him or hated him”. In 1947, Rev. Alfred Poil, a minister in Saskatchewan, Canada, stated that many people Branham pronounced as healed later died. A year later, W. J. Taylor, a district superintendent with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, raised the same concern and asked for a thorough investigation. Taylor presented evidence that claims of the number of people healed were vastly overestimated. He stated, “there is a possibility that this whole thing is wrong”. The number of people claiming to be healed in Branham’s campaign meetings “is impossible to approximate” and the numbers vary greatly between sources. According to Kydd, by watching films of the revival meetings, “the viewer was left with the impression of people healed, but the reels proved otherwise the few times follow-up was made. No consistent record of follow-ups was made, making analysis of the claims difficult to subsequent researchers. Pentecostal historian Walter Hollenwefer said, “very few were actually healed”. Some attendees of Branham’s meetings believed the healings were a hoax and accused him of selectively choosing who could enter the prayer line. Some people left his meetings disappointed after finding Branham’s conviction that everyone in the audience could be healed, but without being in the prayer line proved incorrect. Branham generally attributed the failure of supplicants to receive healing to their lack of faith.

The word of knowledge gift was likewise subject to much criticism. Hollenwefer investigated Branham’s use of the word of knowledge gift and found no instances in which Branham was mistaken in his often-detailed pronouncements. Criticism of Branham’s use of this gift was primarily around its nature; some accused him of witchcraft and telepathy. Branham was openly confronted with such criticisms and rejected the assertions.
In January 1950, Branham's campaign team held their Houston campaign, one of the most significant series of meetings of the revival. The location of their first meeting accommodated approximately 8,000 attendees, and they had to relocate to the Sam Houston Coliseum. On the night of January 24, 1950, Branham was photographed during a debate between Bosworth and local Baptist minister W. E. Best regarding the theology of divine healing. Bosworth argued in favor, while Best argued against. The photograph showed a light above Branham's head, which he and his associates believed to be supernatural. The photograph became well-known in the media and is regarded by Branham's followers as an iconic relic. Branham believed the light was divine vindication of his ministry; others believed it was a glare from the venue's overhead lighting.

In January 1951, U.S. Congressman William Upshaw, who had been crippled for nearly 59 years as a result of an accident, said he was miraculously healed and had regained the ability to walk in a Branham meeting, further fueling Branham’s fame. Upshaw sent a letter describing his healing claim to each member of Congress. Among the widespread media reports was a story in the Los Angeles Times that described it as "perhaps the most effective healing testimony this generation has ever seen". Upshaw died in November 1952, at the age of 86.

Branham's meetings were regularly attended by journalists, who wrote articles about the miracles reported by Branham and his team throughout the years of his revivals, and claimed patients were cured of various ailments after attending prayer meetings with Branham. Durban Sunday Tribune and The Natal Mercury reported wheelchair-bound people rising and walking. Winnipeg Free Press reported a girl was cured of deafness. El Paso Herald-Post reported hundreds of attendees at one meeting waiting in line for healing. Loganpost Press reported a father's claim that his four-year-old son, who suffered from a rare brain ailment, benefited from Branham's meetings. Despite such occasional glowing reports, most of the press coverage Branham received was negative.

According to Hollenweger, "Branham filled the largest and most inflationary campaign halls during his five major international campaigns. Branham held his first series of campaigns in Europe during April 1950 with meetings in Finland, Sweden, and Norway. Attendance at the meetings generally exceeded 7,000 despite resistance to his meetings by the state churches. In Norway, the Directorate of Health forbade Branham from laying hands on the sick and sent police to his meetings to enforce the order. Branham was the first American deliverance minister to successfully tour in Europe. A 1952 campaign in South Africa had the largest attendance in Branham's career, with an estimated 200,000 attendees. According to Lindsay, the altar call at his Durban meeting received 30,000 converts. During international campaigns in 1954, Branham visited Portugal, Italy, and India. Branham's final major overseas tour in 1955 included visits to Switzerland and Germany.

Financial difficulties

In 1955, Branham's campaigning career began to slow following financial setbacks. Even after he became famous, Branham continued to wear inexpensive suits and refused large salaries; he was not interested in amassing wealth as part of his ministry and was reluctant to solicit donations during his meetings. During the early years of his campaigns, donations had been used to cover costs, but from 1955, donations failed to cover the costs of three successive campaigns, one of which incurred a $15,000 deficit. Some of Branham's business associates thought he was partially responsible because of his lack of interest in the financial affairs of the campaigns and tried to hold him personally responsible for the debt. Branham briefly stopped campaigning and said he would have to take a job to repay the debt, but the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International, which was being offered financial assistance to cover the debt, Branham became increasingly reliant on the Full Gospel Businessmen to finance his campaign meetings as the Pentecostal denominations began to withdraw their financial support.

By 1960, the number of evangelists holding national campaigns dropped to 11. By the mid-1950s, dozens of the ministers associated with Branham and his campaigns had launched similar healing campaigns. Through the Voice of Healing magazine, Branham and Lindsay ineffectively attempted to discourage their activities by saying Branham wished they would help their local churches rather than launch national campaigns. The swelling number of competitors and emulators further reduced attendance at Branham's meetings. His correspondence also decreased sharply; whereas he had once received "a thousand letters a day", his mail dropped to 75 letters a day but Branham thought the decline was temporary. He continued expecting something greater, which he said "nobody will be able to imitate". In 1955, he reported a vision of a renewed tent ministry and a "third pull which would be dramatically different" than his earlier career.

End of the revival

By the mid-1950s, dozens of the ministers associated with Branham and his campaigns had launched similar healing campaigns. In 1956, the healing revival reached its peak, as 49 separate evangelists held major meetings. Through the Voice of Healing magazine, Branham and Lindsay ineffectively attempted to discourage their activities by saying Branham wished they would help their local churches rather than launch national campaigns. The swelling number of competitors and emulators further reduced attendance at Branham's meetings. His correspondence also decreased sharply; whereas he had once received “a thousand letters a day”, his mail dropped to 75 letters a day but Branham thought the decline was temporary. He continued expecting something greater, which he said “nobody will be able to imitate”. In 1955, he reported a vision of a renewed tent ministry and a “third pull which would be dramatically different” than his earlier career.

Among Branham’s evangelists was Jim Jones, the founder and leader of the Peoples Temple. Seeking a means to catapult his fame and earn followers, he invited Branham to a self-organized religious convention held at the Palace Tabor Hall auditorium in Indianapolis from June 11 to 15, 1956. To draw the crowds he was seeking, Jones needed a religious headliner and arranged for Branham to be the key figure. Jones later reported that Branham performed numerous miracles, drawing a crowd of 11,000. Jones later became known for the mass murder and suicide at Jonestown in November 1978. According to Collins, Jim Jones and Paul Schäfer were influenced to move to South America by Branham’s 1961 prophecy concerning Armageddon. Collins and Duyzer concluded that Jones did not “see eye-to-eye” with Branham and that Jones did not believe Branham was honest.

By 1960, the number of evangelists holding national campaigns dropped to 11. Several perspectives on the decline of the healing revival have been offered. Crowder suggested Branham's gradual separation from Gordon Lindsay played a major part in the decline. Harrell attributed the decline to the increasing number of evangelists crowding the field and straining the financial resources of the Pentecostal denominations. Weaver agreed Pentecostal churches gradually withdrew their support for the healing revival, mainly over the financial stresses put on local churches by the healing campaigns. The Assembly of God, were the first to openly withdraw support from the healing revival in 1953. Weaver pointed to other factors that may have helped destroy the initial ecumenism of the revival; tension between the independent evangelists and the Pentecostal churches caused by the evangelists' fund-raising methods, denominational pride, sensationalism, and doctrinal conflicts—particularly between the Oneness and Trinitarian factions within Pentecostalism.

Branham argued that his entire ministry was divinely inspired and could not be selectively rejected or accepted, saying, “It's either all of God, or none of God”. His correspondence with several hundred ministers, itinerant evangelists and emulators further reduced attendance at Branham's meetings. His correspondence also decreased sharply. Whereas he had once received “a thousand letters a day,” his mail dropped to 75 letters a day but Branham thought the decline was temporary. He continued expecting something greater, which he said “nobody will be able to imitate”. In 1955, he reported a vision of a renewed tent ministry and a “third pull which would be dramatically different” than his earlier career.

Despite his rejection by the growing Charismatic movement, Branham's followers became increasingly dedicated to him during his later life; some even claimed he was the Messiah. Branham quickly condemned their belief as heresy and threatened to stop ministering, but the belief persisted. Many followers moved great distances to live near his home in Jeffersonville and, led by Leo Mercer, subsequently set up a colony in Arizona following Branham's move to Tucson in 1962. Branham lamented Mercer and the actions of his group as he worried that a cult was being formed among his most fanatical followers.

Branham continued to travel to churches and preach his doctrine across North America during the 1960s. He held his final set of revival meetings in Shreveport at the church of his early campaign manager Jack Moore in November 1965.

Teachings

Branham developed a unique theology and placed emphasis on a few key doctrines, including his eschatological views, annihilationism, oneness of the Godhead, predestination, eternal security, and the serpent's seed. His followers refer to his teachings collectively as “The Message”. Kydd and Weaver have both referred to Branham's teachings as “Branhamology”. Most of Branham's teachings have preceded within sects of the Pentecostal movement or in other non-Pentecostal denominations. The doctrines Branham imported from non-Pentecostal traditions are his serpent’s seed, oneness of the Godhead, and predestination. The result led to widespread criticism from non-Pentecostal churches and the Charismatic movement. His unique arrangement of doctrines, coupled with the highly controversial nature of the serpent seed doctrine, caused the alienation of many of his former supporters.
sermons were inspired through an angelic visitation. In the sermons on the seven church ages, Branham regarded his 1963 series of sermons on the Godhead as a highlight of his ministry.

Annihilationism

Annihilationism is a doctrinal conflict within Pentecostalism that first appeared within the movement in the teachings of Charles Fox Parham. Not all Pentecostal sects accepted the teaching. Prior to 1957, Branham taught a doctrine of eternal punishment in hell. By 1957 he had adopted an annihilationist position in keeping with Parham's teachings. He began promoting the belief that punishment of the damned in Hell would not last for eternity and that eventually the damned would cease to exist. He believed that “eternal life was reserved only for God and his people.” In 1960, Branham claimed the Holy Spirit had revealed this doctrine to him as one of the end-time mysteries. Promoting annihilationism led to the alienation of Pentecostal groups that had rejected Parham’s teaching on the subject.

Godhead

Like other doctrines, the Godhead formula was a point of doctrinal conflict within Pentecostalism. As Branham began offering his own viewpoint, it led to the alienation of Pentecostal groups adhering to Trinitarianism. Branham shifted his theological position on the Godhead during his ministry. Early in his ministry, Branham espoused a position closer to an orthodox Trinitarian view. By the early 1950s, he began to privately preach the Oneness doctrine outside of his healing campaigns. By the 1960s, he had changed to openly teaching the Oneness position, according to which there is one God who manifests himself in multiple ways, in contrast with the Trinitarian view that three distinct persons comprise the Godhead.

Branham believed that the Godhead was tritheism and insisted members of his congregation be re-baptized in Jesus' name in imitation of Paul the Apostle. Branham believed his doctrine to be an enhanced difference from the Oneness doctrine and to the end of his ministry he openly argued that he was not a proponent of Oneness doctrine. He distinguished his baptismal formula from the Oneness baptism formula in the name of Jesus by teaching that the baptismal formula should be in the name of Lord Jesus Christ. He argued that there were many people named Jesus but there is only one Lord Jesus Christ. By the end of his ministry, his message required an acceptance of the oneness of the Godhead and baptism in the name of Lord Jesus Christ.

Predestination

Branham adopted and taught a Calvinistic form of the doctrine of predestination, and openly supported Calvin's doctrine of Eternal Security, both of which were at odds with the Arminian view of predestination held by Pentecostals. Unlike his views on the Godhead and Annihilationism, there was no precedence within Pentecostalism for his views on predestination, and opened him to widespread criticism. Branham lamented that more so than any other teaching, Pentecostals criticized him for his predestination teachings. Branham believed the term "predestination" was widely misunderstood and preferred to use the word "foreknowledge" to describe his views.

Opposition to modern culture

As Branham's ministry progressed, he increasingly condemned modern culture. According to Weaver, Branham’s views on modern culture were the primary reason the growing Charismatic movement rejected him; his views also prevented him from following his contemporaries who were transitioning from the healing revival to the new movement. He taught that immoral women and education were the central sins of modern culture and were the result of the serpent’s seed. Branham viewed education as “Satan’s snare for intellectual Christians who rejected the simplicity of the Message and the messenger”. Weaver wrote that Branham held a “Christ against Culture” opinion, according to which loyalty to Christ requires rejection of non-Christian culture; an opinion not unique to Branham.

Pentecostalism inherited the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification and outward holiness from its founders, who came from Wesleyan-influenced denominations of the post-American Civil War era. The rigid moral code associated with the holiness movement had been widely accepted by Pentecostals in the early twentieth century. Branham's strict moral code echoed the traditions of early Pentecostalism but became increasingly unpopular as he refused to accommodate mid-century Pentecostalism's shifting viewpoint. He denounced cigarettes, alcohol, television, rock and roll, and many forms of worldly amusement.

Branham strongly identified with the lower-class roots of Pentecostalism and advocated an ascetic lifestyle. When he was given a new Cadillac, he kept it parked in his garage for two years out of embarrassment. Branham openly chastised other evangelists, who seemed to be growing wealthy from their ministries and opposed the prosperity messages being taught. Branham did not view financial prosperity as an automatic result of salvation. He rejected the prosperity gospel that originated in the teachings of Oral Roberts and A. A. Allen. Branham condemned any emphasis on expensive church buildings, elaborate choir robes, and large salaries for ministers, and insisted the church should focus on the imminent return of Christ.

Branham’s opposition to modern culture emerged most strongly in his condemnation of the “immorality of modern women”. He taught that women with short hair were breaking God’s commandments and according to Weaver, “ridiculed women’s desire to artificially beautify themselves with makeup”. Branham believed women were guilty of committing adultery if their appearance was intended to motivate men to lust, and viewed a woman’s place as “in the kitchen”. The creation story in which Eve is taken from Adam's side, Branham taught that woman was a byproduct of man. According to Weaver, “his pronouncements with respect to women were often contradictory” and he regularly offered glowing praise of women. Weaver stated that Branham “once told women who wore shorts not to call themselves Christians” but qualified his denunciations by affirming that obedience to the holiness moral code was not a requirement for salvation. Branham did not condemn women who refused the holiness moral code to Hell, but he insisted they would not be part of the rapture.

Branham described the characteristics of the serpent’s seed in his ministry. According to Weaver, the serpent’s seed was “a woman-hater”, but he insisted he only hated immorality. According to Edward Babinski, women who follow the holiness moral code Branham supported regard it as “a badge of honor”.

Serpent’s seed

Branham taught an unorthodox doctrine of the source of original sin. He believed the story of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden is allegorical and interpreted it to mean the serpent had sexual intercourse with Eve and that their offspring was Cain. Branham taught that Cain’s modern descendants were masquerading as educated people and scientists, and that Cain’s descendants were “a big religious bunch of illegitimate bastard children” who comprised the majority of society's criminals. He believed the serpent was the missing link between the chimpanzee and man, and speculated that the serpent was possibly a human-like giant. Branham held the belief that the serpent was transformed into a reptile after it was cursed by God.

Weaver commented on Branham’s interpretation of the story: “Consequently every woman potentially carried the literal seed of the devil”.

Branham first spoke about original sin in 1958; he rejected the orthodox view of the subject and hinted at his own belief in a hidden meaning to the story. In later years, he made his opinion concerning the sexual nature of the fall explicitly known. Weaver wrote that Branham may have become acquainted with serpent’s seed doctrine through his Baptist roots, Daniel Parker, an American Baptist minister from Kentucky, promulgated a similar doctrine in the mid-1800s. According to Peary Green, Branham’s teaching on the serpent’s seed doctrine was viewed by the broader Pentecostal movement as the “Hitler doctrine... that ruined his ministry”. No other mainstream Christian group held a similar view; Branham was widely criticized for spreading the doctrine. His followers view the doctrine as one of his greatest revelations.

Eschatology

In 1960, Branham preached a series of sermons on the seven church ages based on chapters two and three of the Book of Revelation. The sermons closely aligned with the teachings of C. I. Scofield and Clarence Larkin, the leading proponents of dispensationalism in the preceding generation. Like Larkin and Scofield, Branham said each church represents a historical age, and that the church of each age was a significant church figure. The message included the description of a messenger to the Laodicean Church age, which Branham believed would immediately precede the rapture. Branham explained the Laodicean age would be immoral in a way comparable to Sodom and Gomorrah, and it would be a time in which Christian denominations rejected Christ. As described by Branham, the characteristics of the Laodicean age resemble those of the modern era. Branham described the characteristics of the Laodicean age messenger by comparing his traits to Elijah and John the Baptist. He asserted the messenger would be a mighty prophet who put the Word of God first, that he would be a lover of the wilderness, that he would hate wicked men, and be an uneducated person. Branham claimed the messenger to this last age would come in the spirit of Elijah and the prophetic Book of Malachi 4:5-6 as the basis for claiming the Elijah spirit would return. His belief in a “seventh church age messenger” came from his interpretation of the Book of Revelation 3:14-22. Branham preached another sermon in 1963, further indicating he was a prophet who had the anointing of Elijah and was a messenger heralding the second coming of Christ. Branham did not believe himself to be the end-time messenger in either of his sermons. Weaver believed Branham desired to be the eschatological prophet he was preaching about, but had self-doubt.

Branham left the identity of the messenger open to the interpretation of his followers, who widely accepted that he was that messenger.

Branham's 1963 series of sermons on the Seven Seals is a high point of his testimony according to Weaver, who noted “a restatement of dispensationalism espoused in the sermons on the seven church ages”. The sermons focused on the Book of Revelation 6:1-17, and provided an interpretation of the meaning of each of the seals. Branham claimed the sermons were inspired through an angelic visitation.
Branham believed in the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ, which he referred to in his sermons and writings. He predicted that the Second Coming would be preceded by various worldwide disasters, the unification of denominational Christianity, and the rise-to-power of the Roman Catholic Pope. He believed that continued allegiance to a denomination was an acceptance of the mark of the beast, which would mean missing the rapture.

Branham taught that Christianity should return to a form mirroring the primitive Christian church. The teaching holds that Christianity should return to a form mirroring the primitive Christian church. The belief is widely held in the modern Charismatic movement, and that Los Angeles would sink into the ocean; his most dramatic prediction. Following both the 1933 and 1964 prophecies, Branham predicted the rapture would happen by 1977 and would be preceded by various world disasters, the unification of denominational Christianity, and the rise-to-power of the Roman Catholic Pope. Peter Duyzer, among other of Branham's critics, wrote that after none of Branham's prophecies came true or that they were all made after the fact. Weaver wrote that Branham tended to embellish his predictions over time.

Branham's followers believe his prophecies came true, or will do so in the future.

Restorationism

All of Branham's doctrines, his teachings on Christian restorationism have had the most lasting impact on modern Christianity. Charismatic writer Michael Moriarty described his teachings on the subject as "extremely significant" because they have "impacted every major restoration movement since." As a result, Moriarty concluded Branham has "profoundly influenced" the modern Charismatic movement. Branham taught the doctrine widely from the early days of the healing revival, in which he urged his audiences to unite and restore a form of church organization like the primitive church of early Christianity. The teaching was accepted and widely taught by many of the evangelists of the healing revival, and they took it with them into the subsequent Charismatic and evangelical movements.

The teaching holds that Christianity should return to a form mirroring the primitive Christian church. It supports the restoration of apostles and prophets, signs and wonders, spiritual gifts, spiritual warfare, and the elimination of non-essential features of modern Christianity.

Branham taught that by the end of the first century of Christianity, the church "had been contaminated by the entrance of an antichrist. As a result, he believed that from a very early date, the church had stopped following the "pure Word of God" and had been seduced into a false form of Christianity.

He stated the corruption came from the desire of early Christianity's clergy to obtain political power, and as a result became increasingly wicked and introduced false creeds. This led to denominationalism, which he viewed as the greatest threat to true Christianity. Branham viewed Martin Luther as the initiator of a process that would result in the restoration of the true form of Christianity, and traced the advancement of the Christian church through other historical church figures. He believed the rapture would occur at the culmination of this process.

Although Branham referred in his sermons to the culmination of the process as a future event affecting other people, he believed he and his followers were fulfilling his restoration beliefs.

Death

On December 18, 1965, Branham and his family--except his daughter Rebekah--were returning to Jeffersonville, Indiana, from Tucson for the Christmas holiday. About three miles (4.8 km) east of Pimona, Texas, and about seventy miles (110 km) southwest of Amarillo on U.S. Highway 60, just after dark, a car driven by a drunken driver traveling westward in the eastbound lane collided head-on with Branham's car. He was rushed to the hospital in Amarillo where he remained comatose for several days and died of his injuries on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1965.

Branham's death stunned the Pentecostal world and shocked his followers. His funeral was held on December 29, 1965, but his burial was delayed. His body was finally buried on April 11, 1966, Easter Monday. Most eulogies only tacitly acknowledged Branham's controversial teachings, focusing instead on his many positive contributions and recalled his wide popularity and impact during the years of the healing revival. Gordon Lindsay's eulogy stated that Branham's death was the will of God and privately accepted the interpretation of Kenneth Hagin, who claimed to have prophesied Branham's death two years before it happened. According to Hagin, God revealed that Branham was teaching false doctrine and God was removing him because of his disobedience.

In the confusion immediately following Branham's death, expectations that he would rise from the dead developed among his followers. Most believed he would have to return to fulfill a vision he had regarding future tent meetings. Weaver attributed the belief in Branham's imminent resurrection to Peary Green, though Green denied it. Even Branham's son Billy Paul seemed to expect his father's resurrection and indicated as much in messages sent to Branham's followers, in which he communicated his expectation for Easter 1966. The expectation of his resurrection remained strong into the 1970s, in part based on Branham's prediction that the rapture could occur by 1977. After 1977, some of his followers abandoned his teachings.

Legacy and influence

Branham was the "initiator of the post-World War II healing revival" and, along with Oral Roberts, was one of its most revered leaders. Branham is most remembered for his use of the "sign-gifts" that awed the Pentecostal world. According to writer and researcher Patsy Sims, "the power of a Branham service and his stage presence remains a legend unparalleled in the history of the Charismatic movement."

The many revivalists who attempted to emulate Branham during the 1950s spawned a generation of prominent Charismatic ministries. According to writer and researcher Patsy Sims, "the power of a Branham service and his stage presence remains a legend unparalleled in the history of the Charismatic movement."

The many revivalists who attempted to emulate Branham during the 1950s spawned a generation of prominent Charismatic ministries. The Toronto Blessing, the Brownsville Revival, and other nationwide revivals of the late 20th century have their roots in Branham's restorationist teachings.

See also

- Christianity portal
- Evangelical Christianity portal

Notes

1. *Branham's birthdate has also been reported to be April 6, 1907 and April 8, 1908.
2. *Pentecostalism is a renewal movement that started in the early 20th century that stresses a post-conversion baptism with the Holy Spirit for all Christians, with speaking in tongues ("glossolalia") as the initial evidence of this baptism.
3. *Oneness Pentecostals is a subset of churches within Pentecostalism which adhere to a modalistic view of God. Their baptismal formula is done "in the name of Jesus", rather than the more common Trinitarian formula "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."
4. *The United Nations debate on how to treat European Jewry following the Holocaust began in January 1946, with a committee recommending settling Jews in Palestine in April 1946. Britain announced its intention to divide Palestine in February 1947; the partition plan was adopted by the UN in November 1947; and State of Israel formally became a nation on May 14, 1948.
5. *Pre-inferential dispensationalism views the establishing of a Jewish state as a sign of the imminent return of Christ.

References


Further reading


Hagiographical


External links

Popular Products

- Amplifiers
- Acoustic Guitars
- Bass Guitars
- Computers
- Cymbals
- Drums
- Electric Guitars
- Electronic Drums
- Microphones
- MIDI Controllers

Music Theory Books

Learning Resources

Popular Music Brands

Brand Resources
William Marrion Branham was born on April 6, 1909, in Cumberland County, Kentucky. He was the oldest of ten children to his parents Charles and Ella Branham. The family later moved to Jeffersonville, Indiana. Growing up, Branham lived in impoverished circumstances, and his father was an alcoholic. As a child, he claimed to have had supernatural experiences, like prophetic visions. Branham left home when he was 19 years old and began working on a ranch in Arizona.