

# Shincheonji

By Steve Matthews

---

**Name and Related Groups:** The groups full name is “*Shincheonji, Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony.*” Shincheonji means “*new heaven and new earth*” in Korean and bases its name on events described in Rev 21:1 and 15:5. Their churches and outreach groups will often conceal their identity and will have names that sound just like regular Christian churches or groups (like *Parachristo, Word and Life Theology School, Living Bread Ministries, Houston Christian Fellowship, etc.*), and their websites and online ads for their Bible study classes generally do not mention Shincheonji or their distinctive doctrines in an effort to try to sound like mainstream Christianity. The “*Zion Christian Mission Center*” is the educational arm of Shincheonji that runs their in-person and online classes. HWPL (*Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light*) is their “international peace organization” that was founded in 2013.

**Founder and Leader:** “Chairman” Lee Man-hee was born September 15, 1931 in the Punggak Village in the Cheongdo District in the North Gyeongsang Province in what is now South Korea.

**Founding Date:** Shincheonji had its “Foundation Day” on March 14, 1984, and came to the United States in 1994. The Shincheonji calendar began in 1984, so 2023 is Year 40.

**Headquarters:** Gwacheon, South Korea.

**Authoritative Material:** The writings, sermons, and videos of Lee Man-hee. Very few of his books are available in English, but “*The Creation of Heaven & Earth*” and “*The Physical Fulfillment of Revelation*” are important works but are not easy to obtain, often even for members. The group used to be extremely secretive but now is attempting to be more “open” where they will now post many of their Bible studies on their YouTube channel in both Korean and English.

## INTRODUCTION

---

The last few decades have seen the rise of a number of controversial Asian cults (such as the *World Mission Society Church of God*,<sup>1</sup> *JMS/ Providence/ Christian Gospel Mission, Eastern Lightning/ the Church of Almighty God*, and *Shincheonji*, among others) that have created a whole new challenge in ways not always associated with new religious movements from other parts of the world. Claims of exploitation and control along with the breakup of families and relationships from former members and families of members have surrounded these groups on different levels than what is often seen in other cults. The intensity and hardline demands placed upon members by the leadership of these groups creates an often-fanatical dedication among members where huge demands on members’ time and money are typically the norm. Former members of these high demand groups will often report that they were love-bombed at first but then were motivated by fear, guilt, and shame. Upon leaving they faced shunning and experienced symptoms of PTSD and will frequently report that years of their life while with their respective group are now simply “missing.” Manipulation and coercive techniques like spying and reporting on fellow members, limiting access to their own materials, not allowing Internet research on their organizations,<sup>2</sup> and having an overly sensitive persecution complex are often a pattern found in high demand groups. It is unfortunate that many high demand groups will often produce spiritually damaged people who will have trouble opening a Bible or even setting foot into a regular church after exiting the group.

*Shincheonji Church of Jesus* (hereafter referred to as “SCJ”) is a very aggressive, high demand, secretive, Korean apocalyptic cult that has a long history of heresy, along with a culture of practicing deception, manipulation, and outright lying on a scale that has rarely been seen among other groups in their recruitment, historical claims, and in the creation of their public image. While their reputation is well-known inside of Korea, they are now seeking to grow their numbers around the world while especially targeting countries like India, the Philippines, Mongolia, South Africa, Uganda, and the United States; where churches and people are unaware of the reputation that they have earned in their homeland.<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes going by the name “*New Heaven and New Earth*,” this extremely zealous group loves to specifically target Christians by various and often underhanded means, and their secrecy is first seen during the recruitment process where the person who is being “harvested” is generally not told the name of the group that they are studying with. This secrecy about their identity usually continues well into their several month *Center Class* that can be held in-person or online and which has an introduction (“*BB*” or *Bible Basics*) class and three core levels – *Basics of the Bible* (foundational lessons on the Bible), *The Secrets of the Bible* (their *Beginners* class on the parables), *Journey Through the Bible* (their *Intermediate* class on Genesis to Jude), and *Revelation’s Fulfillment* (their *Advanced* class on the prophecies and fulfillment of Revelation). On top of this, the students are often shocked to learn later in the classes that a number of the other students were not even students at all but they were actually “*maintainers*” - registered Shincheonji members who were only pretending to be fellow students! Upon completion of the classes, students are given a test and are then invited to have their names written in “the Book of Life” and start attending SCJ church services.

## HISTORY

---

Beginning from an early age Lee Man-hee (LMH) is said to have had many supernatural visitations such as glowing balls of light which would appear to him for days at a time. In 1957, he became very involved in the controversial *Olive Tree Movement* founded by Park Tae-seon (1915-1990) and remained in this cult for ten years. According to SCJ, true Christianity disappeared from the earth soon after the ministry of Jesus, but when seven men gathered together to study the Bible at the home of Yoo In-gu in Gwacheon in 1966, they all audibly heard the voice of Jesus who was choosing them as the seven angels/messengers of Rev 1:16, 20 to restore His true church to the world. Jesus then proceeded to teach them through Yoo (who took on the name “Immanuel”) in a grass hut on Mount Cheonggye for 100 days, and God’s true church was restored in Gwacheon through these men on March 14, 1966 as the *Tabernacle Temple*. Also, during the 100-day training, the Seven Messengers were commanded by God to seal this covenant in their blood by cutting into their right palms and even cut the arteries in their wrists. Despite Mr. Yoo being chosen and personally taught by Jesus through visions, he was quickly expelled from the Tabernacle by his son Yoo Jae-yeol (who went by “Samson”) who would appoint himself as the leader of the Seven Messengers and as the pastor of the Tabernacle Temple.

In the spring of 1967, “through the guidance of a large star,” LMH joined the Tabernacle Temple which soon experienced apostasy and destruction when “the Nicolaitans” (the Korean anti-cult organization *Stewardship Education Institute*) came in and destroyed it by working with its now corrupted leadership. In 1971, LMH left the Tabernacle Church and returned to his hometown after allegedly being threatened by the leadership of the church. One day in 1977, when returning from visiting a friend, Jesus appeared to LMH and anointed him (as described in Rev.1:17f) and sent him back to Gwacheon to write letters telling the leaders and the people of the Tabernacle Temple to repent (as in Rev 2 and 3), and for him to overcome. In the spring of 1980, an angel wearing white traditional Korean clothes appeared to LMH holding the small book (of Rev. 10) which he was commanded to eat so that he could understand all of the events of Revelation. Since that time LMH continues to have visions and communications from Jesus and angels explaining the physical fulfillment of Revelation, and God used him to establish His church in 1984.

LMH repeatedly says that he is just a farmer, was never evangelized by any church, he never went to seminary, and is not a pastor, but was sent by Jesus to the churches to testify what he saw and heard. In his recounting of history LMH somehow leaves out that he was a part of another cult led by Baek Man-bong called the *Recreation Church* from around 1977 to March of 1980, and that many of the teachings of Shincheonji are exactly the same as what were taught by Baek and the Olive Tree Movement, in addition to what he took from the Tabernacle Temple. As is the case with perhaps most cults, there is an official history and a true history, and Shincheonji has certainly created their own version of their history.

### Lee Man-Hee

All cult leaders are overly revered, but it is hard to think of any leader who makes bigger claims than Lee Man-hee.<sup>4</sup> Just as Jesus was the “*Promised Pastor*” who was prophesied in the Old Testament, Chairman Lee is the chosen Promised Pastor who has appeared to build God’s kingdom by gathering and sealing God’s people today in “the time of fulfillment.” The Apostle John *prophesied* the events of Revelation, but as the “*New John*” God’s chosen pastor is the one who explains *the fulfillment* of those prophecies since he has “*seen and heard all of the events of Revelation*” and “*has*

*mastered the whole Bible.*” Despite his current age of 91, many SCJ members claim that their Chairman will not die but will remain alive until the fulfillment of Revelation is completed.

According to SCJ, LMH can be seen everywhere through the Bible, and especially in the Book of Revelation. He claims to be the Comforter that Jesus spoke of in John chapters 14 to 16, as well as the prophesied “faithful and wise servant” of Matt. 24, he is “the tree of life” in the Bible, and will sit with Jesus on God’s throne.

LMH also sees himself as appearing throughout the Book of Revelation – he claims to be the Messenger in Rev. 1:1-2; “the one who overcomes” and the one who wrote the letters to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3; the pillar in God’s temple in Rev. 3:12; the one who went up to heaven in Rev. 4:1; the one in front of God’s throne in Rev. 5; the one who is sealing the 144,000 in Rev. 7; the one who is the golden censer of Rev. 8; the one who eats the little book in Rev. 10; one of the Two Witnesses in Rev. 11; he is the Seventh Trumpet in Rev. 11; the male child born in Rev. 12; he is the white horse that Jesus rides on in Rev 19; he is the bride of Christ in Rev. 19; and the John who is spoken of in Rev. 22:8.

## **DOCTRINE**

---

The basic premise of Shincheonji is that God chose, in 1966, to restore the truth which had been lost to a group of seven men in South Korea who formed a church called the Tabernacle Temple, which also fell away through apostasy and betrayal, but then was again restored as Shincheonji Church by Lee Man-hee who overcame. The “new heavens and new earth” are not to be understood literally (and neither are most of the events of Revelation) but this refers to the passing away of the traditional churches to be replaced by God’s kingdom of Shincheonji. The meaning of the Book of Revelation was hidden in parables so that no one in heaven or on earth has been able to understand the truth for 6,000 years until now when Revelation’s fulfillment is taking place. All of the events of Revelation have already had their physical fulfillment in South Korea in the past few decades, except for some of the events of chapters 18 to 20 which will soon be fulfilled.

The only true church is Shincheonji which is the kingdom of God and is composed of the 12 tribes (named after the 12 disciples) who make up the 144,000, along with “the great multitude in white” mentioned in Revelation chapter 7. All other churches are Babylon and are false churches being led by “false pastors” who “add and take away from the Book of Revelation.” “Babylon churches” who are “drunk with the maddening wine of adultery” are “the kingdom of demons,” “the sons of hell,” and the commentaries of the “denominations of traditions” are the cup in the hand of the great prostitute in Revelation chapter 17.

Prior to 1984 one could be saved by faith in Jesus, but today one needs to be a registered member of Shincheonji, understand the parables which are hidden “the secrets of the kingdom of heaven,” and believe in the testimony of Lee Man-hee. Having faith in Christ alone is no longer enough to be saved as we are now under “the New Covenant of the Book of Revelation.” According to Lee Man-hee, *“This means that no one can come to Jesus, gain eternal life, or enter heaven except through the one that overcomes...Today, Revelation is being fulfilled, and salvation can only be obtained through the promised one who overcomes.”*<sup>5</sup>

Shincheonji denies the central biblical doctrine of the Trinity, and also denies Christ’s deity (and preexistence before His birth), His resurrected body (He was raised with a body that became a spirit as He ascended into the clouds), and His future glorious Second Coming.<sup>6</sup> SCJ teaches that Jesus has already returned in 1966 in spirit when he started teaching his message in South Korea, the thousand-year Millennial Kingdom began in 1984, and the Great Tribulation that Jesus spoke of was the COVID-19 global pandemic.

### **Deception and Lying**

Many cults excuse lying but Shincheonji does this perhaps worse than any other group. A righteous lie where the end justifies the means in furthering God’s kingdom is called “*the wisdom of hiding*” and is perfectly okay with God. The Bible is even used to justify lying citing 1 Cor. 9:20-22 (which is actually about contextual evangelism), even though God clearly hates lies (Prov. 6:16-17;12:22). Members will falsely say that they believe in the Trinity, and websites will portray SCJ church as being “non-denominational” which is blatantly dishonest considering their hatred for the Babylon churches. New recruits are even groomed to lie even before they become members. They are instructed to hide the facts about going to meetings and that they are going to Bible studies from their families and friends while they are learning about Shincheonji. While SCJ claims that their members are the 12 tribes and the 144,000 mentioned in the Book of Revelation it is difficult to see

how this can be referring to them because in Rev. 14:5 the Bible states, in reference to the 144,000, that “no lie was found in their mouth.”

### **Infiltration into Christian Churches and Recruiting Practices**

SCJ is targeting Christians and uses an “end justifies the means” approach where they can engage in sheep stealing by any means necessary (Jude 4). In some areas they will systematically try to look for Christian churches to go after congregation members, and even church leadership with their “pastor evangelism teams” (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

The goal is always the same - “*come join our Bible study to study the parables and the Book of Revelation*” to the unsuspecting; whether on college campus or through the major social media platforms as well as on popular apps like *Nextdoor* or *Discord*. They are even recruiting young people by creating accounts on dating apps like *Bumble* and the Christian dating app *HOLY* (formerly *United Young*) to bring people into their online Zoom Bible studies. Christian leaders, parents, and laypeople need to become aware of this insidious threat where believers are being aggressively targeted and love bombed. Just as one should not take candy from strangers, in a world full of false teachers one must not be quick to study the Bible with anyone who comes along.

## **CHRISTIAN RESPONSE**

In responding to members of SCJ,<sup>7</sup> one can demonstrate problems with their concept of the physical fulfillment of Revelation. SCJ once taught that the 144,000 would be sealed prior to the start of the tribulation, but now teaches that the gathering of the 12 tribes is happening at the same time as the tribulation. SCJ originally taught that the tribulation would fall *only* on Babylon, but now teaches that *all* people are affected. If the “New John” has seen and heard all things in Revelation, then he must be “adding and taking away” from Revelation himself if he could not get this right.

The biblical gospel of salvation has been replaced by a “*new gospel*” which is “*the testimony of the fulfillment of the prophecies*” which makes it *another gospel* contrary to what we have received (Gal. 1:6-9). The biblical gospel finds its centrality in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4), but the members of Shincheonji have replaced this with the work and the importance of LMH because salvation comes through him in addition to the work of the cross. The work of LMH is spoken of infinitely more often than the work and the importance of Jesus in SCJ books and messages. While Jesus is the central figure in the New Testament, in this age and in the age to come; one is not saved by a man but by Christ alone (Acts 4:12, John 14:6). Furthermore, the church that Jesus established did not have to be established once, twice, or three times as SCJ maintains (Matt. 16:18; Jude 3). Contrary to SCJ teaching, Jesus is clearly God (John 1:1; 20:28), pre-existed (John 8:58; 12:39-41; 17:5,24), and right now lives in His resurrected body (Col. 2:9).

When engaging the SCJ member the Christian should focus on how one obtains salvation and press him on it, contrasting SCJ’s view with a biblical presentation of true salvation. When asked about how one obtains salvation many SCJ members will become uncomfortable and will not be able to provide a concise and clear answer. The biblical answer is very different from SCJ’s “gospel of prophecies” (see Acts 16:30, 31; John 3:16; Rom. 10:9,10). Even though members of Shincheonji hate the “Babylon churches” and the orthodox teachings of Scripture, while at the same time trying to sheep-steal from the churches they hate; one must be on guard for what they are trying to do and at the same time, by God’s grace, love them realizing that “*There but for the grace of God go I..*”<sup>8</sup>

### **Notes**

- 1 A separate 4-page Profile has been published on this subject: Steve Matthews, “World Mission Society Church of God,” *Profile Notebook* (Arlington, Texas: Watchman Fellowship, Inc. 1994-2023). A complete collection of Profiles (over 600 pages) is available at [www.watchman.org/notebook](http://www.watchman.org/notebook). This Profile is available at [https://www.watchman.org/Files/Profile\\_WMSCOG.pdf](https://www.watchman.org/Files/Profile_WMSCOG.pdf)
- 2 Both Shincheonji and the World Mission Society Church of God call this “eating of the knowledge of the tree of good and evil.”
- 3 Many churches in Korea have up signs in their entrances saying “Shincheonji Out!”
- 4 While some critics have said that LMH is the Second Coming of Jesus, this is not accurate.

- 5 Lee Manhee, *The Physical Fulfillment of Revelation*, (Shincheonji Press, 2015), 10-11.
- 6 SCJ teaches that Jesus is not coming again and we should not be looking forward to any future Second Coming. All of the verses speaking of Christ’s return have already been fulfilled spiritually in the person and in the ministry of LMH who has come to us.
- 7 See [www.ExaminingTheSCJ.com](http://www.ExaminingTheSCJ.com) for more information.
- 8 Origin unknown. Further resources concerning SJC: [www.ExaminingTheSCJ.com](http://www.ExaminingTheSCJ.com), [www.reddit.com/r/shincheonji](http://www.reddit.com/r/shincheonji), <http://shincheonjiandthebible.blogspot.com/>, <https://truthaboutshincheonji.com/>



**Profile** is a regular publication of Watchman Fellowship, Inc. Readers are encouraged to begin their own religious research notebooks using these articles. Profiles are published by Watchman Fellowship approximately 6 times per year, covering subjects such as new religious movements, counterfeit Christianity, the occult, New Age Spirituality, and related doctrines and practices. Complete Profile Notebooks containing all Profiles published to date are available. Please contact Watchman Fellowship for current pricing and availability. Copyright © 2023 by Watchman Fellowship. All rights reserved.