



Laying Up Treasures on Earth

by Charles C. Ryrie

‘Underground Condominium Offers Haven for Pessimists,” read a recent *Wall Street Journal* headline.

For \$78,000, Survive Tomorrow, Inc. will sell you a two-bedroom, one-and-a-half-bath, radiation-proof, underground condominium in La Verkin, Utah. Four man-years of dried food (at 2,400 calories per day) are included.

Last year at one convention alone, 4,732 people paid \$400 each to hear the merits of buying gold, stockpiling food, and other ways of surviving coming hard times. Among the many exhibits was a booth that sold 50-hour candles.

And there were thirty similar conventions in the U.S. in 1980.

People have always been unusually fascinated with gold. Genesis says Pishon, one division of the river that flowed from the Garden of Eden, flowed around the land of Havilah “where there is gold” (Gen. 2:11).

In the Bible, gold both prostituted and enhanced the worship of God.

The Israelites idolized the golden calf and Achan coveted a wedge of gold. God ordered that gold adorn the tabernacle and Solomon’s temple, and the wise men honored our Lord with a gift of gold. The heavenly Jerusalem will be a city of gold with a street of gold (Rev. 21:18, 21).

Many today, including Christians, wonder whether they should invest in

gold. Will it help insulate them against future shocks?

Whether gold is a good investment or not, I leave to the judgment of others. But I think the Bible says something about stockpiling it.

The Bible commends proper planning and saving (2 Cor. 12:14; 1 Tim. 5:8). Stockpiling involves building an excessive supply of essential commodities to survive some future shortage or catastrophe. Forecasts of economic and military upheavals are prodding the current interest in stockpiling.

Certainly the case for stockpiling would be strengthened if we could make some or all of the following assumptions: that (1) the U.S. will survive as a secure nation; (2) there will be food and goods to buy in the coming holocaust; (3) I have no responsibility for others; (4) prolonging life is the highest goal for the believer; and (5) the church will be on earth during the tribulation.

How valid are these assumptions?

Will the U.S. survive as a secure nation?

The Bible says a number of nations will play a prominent role in end time events, but the United States, Canada, Australia, nations in South America and South Africa are not among them.

Egypt is mentioned (Dan. 11:42), the kings of the east (Rev. 16:12), an alliance from the area to Palestine’s north which may include Persia or Iran (Ezek. 38:2, 5-6, 15), and the ten-nation federation west of Palestine headed by the Antichrist (Dan. 7:24). But not the United States.

What will happen to the U.S. and other unnamed countries? There are only three possibilities: They will be wiped out, neutralized, or allied with a bloc of nations the Bible does mention. Since—up to this century, at least—most of the immigration to the U.S. came from future western alliance countries, some think the U.S. will be linked in some way to that bloc.

Possibly. But, remember, the Antichrist will rule that bloc with an iron dictatorship, both political and religious. That’s not a pretty prospect.

Nothing promises the U.S. will be a safe, secure place where people can use their stockpile of gold, food, or whatever.



Will you be able to buy something in the coming crunch? There will not be too many people here to do much of anything in the end times. Indeed, Isaiah prophesied: “I will make man more scarce than fine gold” (Isa. 13:12).

Two judgments alone during the tribulation days will depopulate the earth by one-half (Rev. 6:8; 9:18). Gold will not be scarce. People will.

Will the survivors be able to buy anything? Not unless they have the mark of the beast in their right hands or on their foreheads (Rev. 13:17). The Antichrist will strictly control the right to buy and sell from your stockpile.

But if he grants permission, what will you buy? Not much in the tribulation days. Gold has always been useful

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to those forced to flee their homelands to purchase in another country what was necessary to make a new life. But where will people flee in tribulation days?

Famine will be worldwide. Earthquakes will be worldwide. The destruction of vegetation will be worldwide. The basic food supply will be reduced by seven-eighths (Rev. 6:6). Necessities will be in the shortest supply. Yet, oddly, luxuries like oil and wine will apparently be available (Rev. 6:6).



Do I have no responsibility to others in need? Can I use my stockpile solely for myself and family? What will I do when a fellow believer comes to my door begging for some food?

Will I turn away the pleas of a desperate neighbor whom I am supposed to love as I love myself? If a mob tries to break down my door knowing there is food and gold inside, will I shoot them?

Will I forget that "whosoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his compassions from him, how dwells the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:17).

Am I my brother's keeper only when it doesn't interfere with my sessions or comfort?

Is prolonging life, especially a comfortable life, the highest goal for a believer? When Paul's life hung in the balance, his concern was not for his personal comfort but for ministry. To live meant to serve Christ; to die meant to be in His presence (Phil. 1:21-24).

Can anything separate us from the

love of Christ? No, Paul exclaims. We are more than conquerors through Christ.

But right in the middle of this triumphant conclusion are these words: "For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Rom. 8:36).

What does Paul mean? He means that normally the Christian lives under a sentence of death all his life. Don't expect comfort. Expect opposition and conflict. This is normal.

How does providing for one's own comfort harmonize with the Lord's admonition not to lay up treasures on earth (Matt. 6:19)?

Twenty-five centuries ago the prophet Zephaniah warned: "Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath" (Zeph. 1:18).

A stockpile cannot deliver anyone ultimately. Personal comfort is not guaranteed. Service in all circumstances is the believer's goal in life.

Will the Church be on earth during the tribulation? Christians do not agree on the answer to this question. Some feel that the Church (that is, the last generation of the Church) will be on earth and experience the tribulation. Others feel that the Church will be caught up into heaven before that seven-year period begins.

Those who believe the Church will be on earth during the tribulation suggest that she will be supernaturally protected from the judgment of that time. At best, however, the protection could only be limited and selective, not general and universal.

How could believers living throughout the world escape the effects of the destruction of vegetation, for example (Rev. 8:7-8)? Would they not feel the effects of the death of fish in the seas (Rev. 8:9) or the turning of rivers and springs to blood (Rev. 8:10-11)?

Clearly, Antichrist will persecute believers (Rev. 13:7), and many will be martyred (Rev. 6:9). So if the Church is on earth during that period, many believers will suffer and die.

If we are now living in the time just before the tribulation begins and if the Church will be on earth during the tribulation, then some Christians living today will go into the tribulation and suffer the trauma of that time.

So it would be very logical for those who believe the Church will go through the tribulation to stockpile and to begin to do it now.

If, on the other hand, the Church will not go through the tribulation, it doesn't make much sense to stockpile. Hard times may come and go (and that may determine the kind of proper planning and investing a person does), but Christians will not be here when the hardest times come.

Consider one thing before you sign up for an underground condominium. The risen Lord gave an important promise to His Church. "I will keep you from the hour of testing which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth" (Rev. 3:10).

The promise is not simply that He will keep us from the trials. It is that He will keep us from the *hour* of the trials. Now if the events of the tribulation affect the whole world directly and indirectly, how can the Church be on the earth during that time and escape the experience of that time?

Granted, it is possible to live through a time and miss some of the events (like being present at a social function but missing some of the activities), but it is not possible to miss the time without also missing the events. And the promise is that the Church will miss the time.

The only way the Church can escape worldwide trouble is not to be on the earth, not to be in a place where time ticks on. And the only place that meets that qualification is heaven. In my judgment, that's where the Church will be during the tribulation.

That's the blessed hope. And in the meantime—we will walk by faith and not by sight, whatever comes. □

