

Strangers in the World

Abraham **Father of Many Strangers** **Lesson 1**

Introduction

“Strangers” is a term the Apostle Peter used to describe Christians living in this world. As we grow in our Christian faith this reality becomes more and more evident—“I’m but a stranger here; heaven is my home.” At the same time, God’s will is that we remain in the world until he calls us home. Through this four-week study we will learn from different believers throughout Scripture who have grappled with this reality. We will see how the Lord in his grace sets their hearts and ours on things above and how he equips us to live as strangers in the world.

Consider Peter’s use of the word “strangers” in the following passages:

1 Peter 1:1-2 – *To God’s elect, **strangers** in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*

1 Peter 1:17-21 – *Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as **strangers** here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.*

1 Peter 2:11-12 – *Dear friends, I urge you, as **aliens** and **strangers** in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

Why do you think Peter liked to use the words “stranger” and “alien” as he addressed Christians 2000 years ago?

Can you think of a specific time when it became evident that you, as a Christian, are a stranger in this world?

We are strangers in relation to this world. However, what does Peter emphasize concerning our relationship to God?

Abraham’s Call and God’s Promise

Genesis 12:1-9 – *The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. ² I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” ⁴ So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. ⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. ⁹ Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.*

Abraham heard and obeyed the call of the Lord. What immediate impact did that have on Abraham and his family?

Have you ever had to pack up and move to a new city, state, or country? What challenges did it bring? What helped you overcome some of those challenges?

What promises did the Lord make to Abraham as he was about to be a stranger in a new land?

Which promises of God especially comfort you as you live as stranger in the world?

Abraham built an altar and called on the name of the Lord. Do you think this would have been a strange practice in Abraham's day?

The Lord through Joshua provides this insight: "*Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods*" (Joshua 24:2). How does this insight intensify the reality that Abraham really was a stranger?

Abraham's Interaction with the Surrounding World

The term "strangers" does not imply that we are to be hermits in this world or that we are to live in our own little bubbles. Rather, the Lord wills that we do interact with the world in such a way that we let our light shine. At the same time we are to be cautious that we do not conform to the world around us. That is the fine line we are to walk as strangers in the world.

Genesis 12:10-13 – *Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. ¹¹ As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. ¹² When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you."* (Abraham pulled a similar stunt in Genesis 20).

Evaluate Abraham's response to a perceived threat.

What does this account reveal about our human nature when we are in a situation where we perceive a potential threat or pressure?

Genesis 13:1,2 – "So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. ² Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold."

Summary of Genesis 13-14 – Abraham and Lot parted ways. Lot settled near Sodom. Surrounding forces joined in battle against the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and carried off Lot. Abraham routed the enemy forces and recovered all that had been captured. The king of Sodom offered his recovered goods to Abram.

Genesis 14:22-24 – "*But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath ²³ that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' ²⁴ I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share."*

What insights does this section give into Abraham's interactions with the surrounding world?

Agree or disagree: "*Abraham wouldn't take a handout from anyone because he wanted everyone to know that he was a self-made man.*"

What opportunities do you have to glorify God in your day-to-day interactions in the world?

Genesis 19:1-5 – *The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. ² “My lords,” he said, “please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.” “No,” they answered, “we will spend the night in the square.”*

³ *But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. ⁴ Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. ⁵ They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.”*

In Genesis 14 we are told that Lot pitched his tents near Sodom. Now where do we find Lot?

To what extent can a Christian immerse himself in the surrounding culture before it negatively impacts his faith?

Abraham’s Faith

As strangers in the world we don’t merely have a faith like Abraham’s. We share the same faith in God’s promises. *“Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7)*. A simple study of the life of Abraham reveals that Abraham was a sinner just like you and I, but he was righteous in God’s sight through faith in the Lord’s promise. Like Abraham, our faith needs to be strengthened and our understanding of God’s promises has room to grow.

Consider times in Abraham’s life when his faith needed to be strengthened:

Genesis 12 and 20 – (On two occasions, Abraham was before kings and feared for his life, so he lied about his relationship to Sarah, his wife.)

Genesis 15:2,3 – *“But Abram said, “O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”*

Genesis 16 – (Sarah and Abraham take matters into their own hands and Abraham conceives a child with Hagar.)

How did the Lord strengthen Abraham’s faith in each of those instances? How does the Lord strengthen your faith?

What is unique about Abraham’s/the Christian’s faith?

Genesis 15:6 – *“Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”*

(See also **Romans 4** and **Galatians 3**)

Genesis 22:13-14 – *“Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”*

Closing thought

Hebrew 11:8-10 – *“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”*

What do you have to look forward to?

For further study: Read **Genesis 12-25** for the entire record of Abraham’s life. Read **Hebrews 11:8-19** for highlights of Abraham’s faith.