GUARDING THE FLOCK

Ezekiel 34:5 … "So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered."

Today's verse concerns what happened to the people of Israel when the priests, rabbis and other leaders failed to protect God's people. God, speaking through Ezekiel, condemns the leaders for being concerned only for themselves, and leaving the people to suffer without spiritual leadership. The story uses the analogy of shepherds and sheep, which is common throughout the Bible. In today's verse, God tells the leaders (shepherds) of Israel that his people (sheep) were scattered and attacked because of their failures to lead, guard and protect.

The coming of Jesus and his sacrifice for us on the cross, changed the rule book for God's kingdom. We are now given direct access to God through his Holy Spirit, instead of through priests and prophets. Now, instead of us being herded together with other believers by a priest, we are each given priestly responsibilities to guard, protect and counsel one another. We call our pastors "shepherds" in light of their role to help keep the sheep (church) together and growing in Christ. But you and I each share that same duty.

The image of a herd of sheep wandering aimlessly and unable to protect themselves, is a good representation of how Old Testament Jews lived. In the New Testament, we are given personal access to God and indwelt with his own Spirit to guide us. If you know of a fellow believer who is making bad decisions in his or her life, you are obligated to counsel that person and help him or her find their way back to harmony with Jesus. If you see a fellow believer falling toward the pit under the consuming evil of satan's power, you are obligated to help deliver that person from danger.

In Genesis 4:9, Cain asked God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer to that is "yes," we are responsible for guarding and protecting our fellow believers in the flock.