Paul famously introduces Romans 11 by stressing the inextricable bond between himself and Israel: "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? μὴ γένοιτο! I myself am an Israelite, from the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin" (Rom 11:1). This statement is straddled by several references to Israel’s ζῆλος in chapters 10–11, prompting a closer look at the connection between Paul’s emphatic claim about his identity as an Israelite and the motif of ζῆλος. Richard H. Bell and Dane C. Ortlund have produced monographs devoted to the ζηλ- word group in Romans, and this chapter will not engage all of the concerns represented in those book-length treatments. Rather, I ask how the linguistic framework and exegetical findings of this monograph contribute to our understanding of Paul’s use of ζῆλος in Rom 10:2; 13:13 and παραζηλόω in Rom 10:19; 11:11, 14. After addressing Ortlund’s treatment of Rom 10:2 and Bell’s reading of Rom 10:19–11:14, I expand on Bell’s suggestion that 10:2 and 10:19 should be viewed together. In light of these findings, I highlight the significance of the language of ζῆλος for Paul’s reflections on Israel; specifically, that Paul makes use of ζῆλος because it connects the language of Deuteronomy 32, Paul’s own experience, and the experience of Israel with Paul’s emphasis on the unity of Christ-followers.

"Zeal Without Knowledge": Dane C. Ortlund and Romans 10:2

I have addressed Ortlund’s thesis in Chapters 1–2 above, noting my dissatisfaction with Ortlund’s decision to treat only the instances he deems ‘Jewish zeal’ (Rom 10:2; Gal 1:14; Phil 3:6) in his exploration of ‘the concept of zeal’ in Paul. In Chapter Three, we saw that Paul’s approach to ζῆλος in Galatians is incomplete if Gal 4:17–18 is not considered alongside Gal 1:14. In this chapter, I address a similar difficulty relating to Romans: Ortlund scarcely mentions the occurrences of παραζηλόω that follow the instance of ζῆλος in Rom 10:2.¹

¹ In Ortlund’s entire monograph, Rom 10:19; 11:11, 14 are mentioned only twice. The first is a passing reference to Bell’s monograph ("Whereas our specific focus is 9.30–10.3, [Bell’s] is mainly 11.11–14"); the second is in a footnote in Ortlund’s survey of Second Temple texts, where
Ortlund does not disagree with the assessment of Bell and others that the παρα- prefix simply makes ζηλόω transitive (‘move to ζῆλος’). Rather, he omits these passages because he assumes that they have no bearing on his reading of ‘jealousy without knowledge’ (ζῆλον...οὐ κατ᾽ἐπίγνωσιν) in Rom 10:2.

This is a costly omission, even given the parameters of Ortlund’s thesis. His central aim is to combat what he views as an overemphasis on the ‘ethnic dimension’ of Israel’s zeal in 10:2, a position most rigorously defended by James D.G. Dunn. “The trouble with Israel’s zeal,” writes Dunn, “was that it was too nationally centered, too much concerned to defend national prerogative as the people of (the one) God.” Ortlund is concerned that by focusing too sharply on this ethnic dimension (a key feature of Dunn’s understanding of the ‘New Perspective’), Dunn “throws Paul’s core concern out of balance.” For Ortlund, this means making zeal in Rom 10:2 too particular:

Whereas Dunn and others see zeal in Paul as earnest devotion to God, the God of Israel, it is more accurate to emphasize that zeal in Paul is earnest devotion to God, the God of Israel. Zeal in Rom. 10.2 includes but ought not be limited to nationalistic concerns. It is, in short, a zeal to obey. This accords with what we have observed in the way zeal is spoken of in the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism.

My interest is not primarily to adjudicate the debate between Dunn and Ortlund, but to expand the conversation to include the other occurrences of the ζηλ- word group in Romans, especially in chs. 10–11. Given the methodological framework established in Chapter One, rather than asking...