There are ten cases of “staring” in Acts. The disciples stare into heaven as Jesus ascends (1:10), and Stephen stares into heaven at his stoning (7:55); Peter and Paul stare at men they are about to heal (3:4; 14:9); Paul stares at Bar Jesus before cursing him (13:9), and at the Sanhedrin before addressing them (23:1); the crowd stares in wonder at Peter (3:12) and the Sanhedrin stares at Stephen (6:15); Cornelius stares at a visiting angel (10:4) and Peter stares into a sheet from heaven (11:6). In each case, the Greek verb ἀτενίζειν is used; only once is it the main verb (3:12); once it is used in the periphrastic tense (1:10); and in every other case, the aorist participle is used with the main verb being either εἶπεν or εἶδον/εἶδος.1

This article intends to explore the use and meaning of this verb in the wider literature and so to offer a fuller understanding of these strange stares in Acts. In his lexicon, Spicq observes: “Among the numerous verbs of seeing in the NT . . . the denominative verb ἀτενίζω merits special attention”.2 Such attention has not been given this verb by New Testament commentators despite the fact that, besides its use in Acts, it occurs twice in the Gospel of Luke,3 and twice, in the same context, in 2 Corinthians.4 The consequence is that commentators work from definitions given by standard lexica and dictionaries, such as “to

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1 These features do not refer to Codex D which, at 3:4, has significant variants as will be noted later.
2 C. Spicq, ἀτενίζω. In: Theological Lexicon of the New Testament, translated and edited by J.D. Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994) 1.227. There is no entry for ἀτενίζειν in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. It is not listed in the lengthy article on “seeing” in that work (5.315-382). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament devotes only a few lines to it and simply indicates its primary meaning and the NT references. There is no comment, nor are there references to other primary or secondary literature (1.177).
3 Lk. 4:20; 22:56.
4 2 Cor. 3:7,13.
look intently at someone or something, to gaze earnestly, to stare".\(^5\) In other words, the verb is understood only in its simple sense and seen to be of little significance.\(^6\) As a result, four important aspects of the verb have gone unnoticed.

First, the most common object of ἀτενίζειν, particularly in Jewish and Christian literature, is a holy person or place. Secondly, the verb is used occasionally when the subject is at prayer, or even in some ecstatic, paranormal state. Thirdly, ἀτενίζειν suggests intuition, most often on the part of a holy person. It is an intuition that is penetrative, as the frequent use of the preposition ἐπί with the verb indicates. And fourthly, the common construction, found in all the literature, of a participial form of ἀτενίζειν followed by a main verb of seeing or speaking suggests that the main verbs are to be understood in a particular way. The subject speaks or sees “with intuition” or “with special perception”.

Those scholars of Acts who do comment on ἀτενίζειν, either describe it as a “favorite word” (Vorzugswort) of Luke,\(^7\) or offer a brief note on 1:10, where the verb is understood to mean little more than a prolonged staring into space. For example, Barrett writes: “peering . . . [the disciples] were straining their eyes to see their departing Lord”.\(^8\) Some

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\(^{8}\) Acts, 1.82.