In order to understand what ultra-dispensationalism is (also known as hyper-dispensationalism), let’s begin by defining dispensationalism. The word dispensation means “stewardship or administration,” and dispensationalism is simply a system of biblical interpretation that recognizes a distinction between the Church (i.e., the body of Christ) and Israel. Dispensationalism carries with it the idea that, throughout the history of redemption, God has given man specific revelation and commands and that man is tested with respect to his obedience to God’s commands or revelation. Therefore, dispensations are different administrations in the eternal outworking of God’s purpose and plan. However, it is important to realize normal dispensationalism acknowledges the fact that the way of salvation—by grace through faith—is the same in every dispensation. Generally, many dispensationalists will recognize seven dispensations: Innocence (Genesis 1:1 – 3:7), Conscience (Genesis 3:8 – 8:22), Human Government (Genesis 9:1 – 11:32), Promise (Genesis 12:1 – Exodus 19:25), Law (Exodus 20:1 – Acts 2:4), Grace (Acts 2:4 – Revelation 20:3), and the Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 20:4 – 20:6). Again, these dispensations are not ways of salvation, but manners in which God relates to man.

One of the inherent dangers of dispensationalism is that it can lead one to overly divide the Bible and see divisions and discontinuity where there shouldn’t be any. This is exactly what the ultra-dispensationalist does. Therefore, ultra- or hyper-dispensationalism would be a teaching that takes the basic tenets of dispensationalism to the very extreme, resulting in unbiblical and often heretical teaching and doctrine. Another movement, known as mid-Acts dispensationalism, Acts 9 dispensationalism, Acts 13 dispensationalism, or Acts 28 dispensationalism, takes a half-way position between classic dispensationalism and hyper-dispensationalism. Also known as the Grace Movement, the tenets of the mid-Acts dispensationalism are not under discussion here. Instead of recognizing that the Church began in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost when the disciples received the promised Holy Spirit, the ultra-dispensationalist would insert another dispensation or division into the Bible and would hold that the Church did not begin until after Paul’s conversion. The three most common ultra-dispensationalist views see the church beginning in Acts 9, Acts 13 or Acts 28. Mid-Acts dispensationalist views see the church beginning in Acts 2. Mid-Acts dispensationalists agree with this view. Some ultra-dispensationalists place the beginning of the church with Paul’s conversion; others, like one of the first ultra-dispensationalists, Ethelbert W. Bulinger, place the beginning of the church even later, with Paul’s imprisonment in Rome. In doing so, they see the church in Acts as being a “Hebrew or Jewish Church,” separate from the “mystery” church to which Paul wrote his prison epistles. They believe that the books of Peter, James, Jude, Hebrews and the epistles of John are all addressed to the Hebrew Church, which is different from the “body of Christ,” and that this Jewish Church, which is built on Kingdom promises, will be reestablished during the millennium and will worship at the rebuilt Temple with atoning sacrifices.

However, the greatest problem with ultra-dispensationalism is not what it believes about when the church began but with the many other errors that come from its approach to Scripture. For example, at the heart of most forms of ultra-dispensationalism is the belief that Paul preached a different gospel than what the other apostles taught. Paul’s prison
epistles only apply directly to the “body of Christ” or Gentile Church, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are relegated to the old dispensation and are not to be practiced by the church today. In reality, what ultra-dispensationalists do is wrongly divide the Word of God and split it into little pieces.

Other heresies that are common to some types of ultra-dispensationalism include such things as soul sleep and annihilationism. Still others proclaim a brand of universalism that grants salvation even to Satan himself. Without a doubt, whatever name you want to call it, ultra-dispensationalism is a dangerous error that almost always leads to other, even worse errors and often outright heretical teachings.

H. A. Ironside, a strong dispensationalist himself, wrote a very good booklet outlining some of the dangers of ultra-dispensationalism and in it says that he has “no hesitancy in saying that its fruits are evil. It has produced a tremendous crop of heresies throughout the length and breadth of this and other lands; it has divided Christians and wrecked churches and assemblies without number; it has lifted up its votaries in intellectual and spiritual pride to an appalling extent, so that they look with supreme contempt upon Christians who do not accept their peculiar views; and in most instances where it has been long tolerated, it has absolutely throttled Gospel effort at home and sown discord on missionary fields abroad. So true are these things of this system that I have no hesitancy in saying it is an absolutely Satanic perversion of the truth.”