Chapter 15: The South in Reconstruction
Objectives:

- We will study the Reconstruction governments in practice, and Southern (black and white) reaction to them.
- We will study the national problems faced by President Ulysses S. Grant, and the reasons for his lack of success as chief executive in the domestic arena.
(Mat 23:26) Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.
THE SOUTH IN RECONSTRUCTION:

- White Southerners disdained reconstruction, viewing government incompetent and corrupt, that brought debt and trampled in the rights of citizens.

- African Americans complained that it did not go far enough in extending equal rights to African Americans.
The Reconstruction Governments:

- Ten States of the South were reorganized under the congressional plan.
- Approximately one-fourth of the white males were at first excluded from voting or holding office.
- Black majority were in South Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana, (states where blacks were also a majority of the population).
- And in Alabama and Florida where they were not.
The Reconstruction Governments:

- But the government soon lifted most suffrage restrictions so that nearly all white males could vote.
- After that, Republicans maintained control only with the support of many Southern Whites.
- Critics called Southern white Republicans scalawags.
- Many were former Whigs who had never felt comfortable in the Democratic Party.
- Some were wealthy or once wealthy planters or businessmen interested in economic development of the region.
The Reconstruction Governments:

- Others were farmers who lived in remote areas where there was no slavery and who hoped the Republican program of internal improvements would end their economic isolation.

- Scalawags shared a belief that the Republican Party would serve economic interests better than the Democrats.
The Reconstruction Governments:

- Carpetbaggers were White men from the North who served as Republican leaders in the South.
- Most were well-educated of middle class origins and many were doctors, lawyers, and teachers.
- Most were veterans of the Union Army who looked on the South as a new frontier, more promising than the West.
The Reconstruction Governments:

- But the most numerous Republicans in the South were black freedman, most of whom had no previous experience in politics.

- Freedman tried to build institutions through which they could learn to exercise their power.

- The Black Church that was created after emancipation also helped give unity and political self-confidence to the former slaves.
The Reconstruction Governments:

- African Americans played significant role in politics of Reconstruction South.
- They served as delegates to the constitutional conventions.
- Held public offices including twenty in the House of Representatives, two in the Senate, also served in state legislatures and in various other state offices.
- Southern whites complained about “Negro Rule” during reconstruction but no such thing ever existed in any of the states.
- No black man was ever elected governor of a Southern State.
The Reconstruction Governments:

- African Americans never controlled any state legislatures.
- In the South as a whole, the percentage of black officeholders was always far lower than the percentage of blacks in the population.
- Although Reconstruction is perceived to be riddled with corruption, it was no more rampant than Northern States.
- And it was a result of the same thing, a rapid economic expansion of government services (and revenues) that put new strains on (and new temptations before) elected officials everywhere.
The end of reconstruction did not end corruption in the Southern state governments. In many states, in fact, corruption increased. But reconstruction provided improvement in services such as public education, public works programs, poor relief, and other costly new commitments.
Education:

- Perhaps the most important of those accomplishments was a dramatic improvement in the education of African Americans and White Southerners with scant learning.
- In the first years of Reconstruction, much of education reform was led by the Freedmen’s Bureau which established schools for African American freedmen.
Education:

- In the 1870s, Reconstruction government also began to build a comprehensive public school system in the South.
- By 1876, more than half of all white children and about 40 percent of all black children were attending schools in the South.
- Several black “academies” offered more advanced education also began operating.
Education:

- These academies developed into renowned African American colleges like Morehouse College.
- Southern education was divided into two separate systems.
- One black and one white, early efforts to integrate the schools of the regions were a dismal failure.
- The freedmen’s Bureau schools, were open to students of all races but almost all Whites stayed away.
Landownership and Tenancy:

- The Freedman Bureau and the Republican Radicals in Congress was to make Reconstruction a vehicle for a fundamental reform of landownership in the South but it failed.
By June of 1865, the bureau had settled nearly 10,000 black families on their own land, most of it drawn from abandoned plantations arousing dreams among former slaves throughout the South of “forty acres and a mule.”

By the end of that year, this experiment was already collapsing.
Southern plantation owners were returning and demanding the restoration of their property.

Even so, distribution of landownership in the South changed considerably in the postwar years.

Among whites, there was a significant decline in landownership, from 80 percent before the war to 67 percent by the end of Reconstruction.
Landownership and Tenancy:

- Some whites lost their land because of unpaid debt or increased taxes; some left the marginal lands they had owned to move to more fertile lands where they rented.
- During the same period, the number of African Americans who owned land rose from virtually none to more than 20 percent.
- Many black landowners acquired their property through hard work or luck or both.
Landownership and Tenancy:

- Still most blacks and growing minority of whites did not own their land during Reconstruction and some who acquired land in the 1860s had lost it by the 1890s.
- These people worked for others in one form or another.
- Many African American agricultural laborers simply worked for wages.
- Most became tenants of white landowners working their own plot of land and paying their landlords either a fixed rent or a share of their crop.
Landownership and Tenancy:

- The new system represented a repudiation of former slaves of the gang labor system of the plantation where they were directly under the master.

- As tenants and sharecroppers African Americans employed at least a physical independence from their landlords and had the sense of working their own land, even if in most cases they could never hope to buy it.
The Per Capita income of Southern blacks rose 46 percent between 1857 and 1879 while the per capita income of the Southern whites declined 35 percent.

This represented one of the most significant redistribution of income in American history.
The Black share of profits was increasing, the total profits of Southern Agriculture were declining.

- A result of the dislocations of the war and a reduction in the world market for cotton

- In addition African Americans were earning a greater return on each hour of labor than they had under slavery, they were working fewer hours.
The Crop-Lien System:

- However it did not leave most African Americans out of poverty.
- Black per capita income rose from about one-quarter of White per capita income to about one-half in the first few years after the war.
- And after this initial increase, it rose hardly at all.
The Crop-Lien System:

- After the Civil War, there were few banks.
- In their stead, was a new system of credit centered in large part on local country stores, some of them owned by planters, others by independent merchants.
- Blacks and Whites, landowners and tenants all depended on these stores for such necessities as food, clothing, seed, and farm implements.
The Crop-Lien System:

- And since farmers did not have the steady cash flow as other workers, customers usually had to rely on credit from these merchants in order to purchase what they needed.
The Crop-Lien System:

- Interest rates were as high as 50 or 60 percent.
- Farmers had to give the merchants in lien (or claim) on their crops as collateral for the loans (thus the term crop-lien system).
- Farmers who suffered a few bad years in a row, as often happened, could become trapped in a cycle of debt from which they could never escape.
The Crop-Lien System:

- This credit system had a number of effects:
- One was that some former slaves had acquired land during the early years of reconstruction gradually lost it because of debt.
- Another effect was the Southern farmers became dependent on cash crops and most of all on cotton because only such marketable commodities seemed to offer any possibility of escape from debt.
The Crop-Lien System:

- Southern Agriculture became as one dimensional as ever as cotton depleted the soil and contributed to the general decline of the Southern economy.
The African American Family and Freedom:

- African Americans sought to reunite with their separated family members after slavery and searched for them in large distances.
- Marriages were now legal and reflected the white family structure.
- African American women desired to largely domestic tasks of the home and to attend to their husband’s needs rather than working the fields thinking it was a badge of slavery.
The African American Family and Freedom:

- But economic necessity required many African American women to engage in income producing activities, working as domestic servants, taking in laundry or helping in the field.
- By the end of Reconstruction, half of all black women over the age of sixteen were working for wages.
- And most black female income earners were married.
Exhausted by the political turmoil of the Johnson administration, Americans yearned for a strong stable leader and turned to Ulysses S. Grant the hero of the war.

Grant could have run for either party, that was how popular he was but believed that the Republican Reconstruction policies were more popular in the North, he accepted the Republican nomination.
The Grant Administration:

- Grant won a narrow victory with 500,000 new black republican voters as the difference maker.
- Grant entered the White House with no political experience, and his performance was clumsy and ineffectual from the start.
- Grant instituted the spoil system and alienated reformed minded Republicans.
- Grant still supported radical republican policies that alienated many Northerners who were against radical reconstruction.
The Grant Scandals:

- The Credit Mobilier Construction Company which had built the Union Pacific Railroad was involved in a scandal.
- The heads of the company used their positions as Union Pacific Stockholders to steer large fraudulent contracts to their construction company.
- Thus bilking the Union Pacific (and the federal government, which provided large subsidies to the railroad) of millions.
The Grant Scandals:

- To prevent investigations, the directors had given Credit Mobilier stock to key members of Congress.
- But in 1872, Congress launched an investigation which revealed that some highly placed Republicans including Schuyler Colfax, now Grant’s Vice President, had accepted stock.
The Grant Scandals:

- Benjamin H. Bristow, Grant’s third Treasury Secretary discovered that some of his officials and a group of distillers operating as a whiskey ring were cheating the government out of taxes by filing false reports.
- A house investigation revealed that William W. Belknap secretary of war, had accepted bribes to retain an Indian-post trader in office.
- There was rampant corruption in the government.
The Panic of 1873 began with the failure of leading investment banking firm, Jay Cooke and Company, which had invested too heavily in postwar railroad building.

It was worse than any other earlier economic crisis and the depression it produced lasted four years.

Debtors now pressured the government to redeem federal war bonds with greenbacks, paper currency of the sort printed during the Civil War which would increase the amount of money in circulation.

Grant and most Republicans wanted a sound currency based solidly on gold reserves.
The Greenback Question:

- Grants policy won out but it made it difficult for debtors because the gold-based money supply could not easily expand.
Republican Diplomacy:

- The Johnson and Grant administrations achieved their greatest successes in foreign affairs.
- It was not because of the presidents but two outstanding Secretaries of State: William H. Seward who had served Lincoln and who remained in office until 1869;
- And Hamilton Fish who served throughout the two terms of the Grant Administration.
Republican Diplomacy:

- Seward who was an ardent expansionist accepted a Russian offer to sell Alaska to the United States for $7.2 million.
- Despite criticism for many Americans who considered Alaska a frozen wasteland and derided it as “Seward’s Folly.”
- In 1867 Seward also engineered the American annexation of the tiny Midway Islands, west of Hawaii.
Republican Diplomacy:

- Hamilton Fish’s challenge was resolving the long-standing controversy with England over the American claims that the British government violated neutrality laws during the Civil War.

- It involved English shipyards building ships (among them the Alabama) for the Confederacy.
Republican Diplomacy:

- American demands that England pay for the damages these vessels had caused known as the *Alabama* claims.
- Fish finally forged an agreement after a number of failed efforts where after an agreement called the Treaty of Washington, international arbitration led to the British to express regret that the ship “escaped” from England.