

Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel

Episodes from the Old Testament

There are nine scenes from the Bible: five small ones set between two pairs of naked figures and four taking up the whole of the space between the friezes that run above the thrones of the Seers. These are no ordinary illustrations of events in the Bible, but an interpretation of the spirit of the Old Testament and of the path taken by humanity in order to arrive at the essence of revelation.

Drunkenness of Noah

(GENESIS IX, 20 et seq.) Noah sleeps beside the vat and the jug from which he drunk. Ham shields him, Japheth covers him, and Shem rebukes the mocker. On the left Noah himself is planting the vine. The scene was executed in 1509, perhaps after that of the Flood, and the figure of Noah digging was painted straight off without a cartoon.

The Flood

(GENESIS VII) The numerous elements of the story are faithfully recorded: the ark, the overloaded boat, the refugees sheltering under the tent on top of the mountain emerging from the waters, the desperate multitude on the rise in the foreground; the feelings of love, fear, and selfishness. The divine wrath represented by a thunderbolt striking the tent has been lost since the plaster has fallen away. According to the sources, it was the first biblical scene to be frescoed. In fact it has the traces of mold that were recorded by both Condivi and Vasari, a consequence of the poor technique used by the sculptor. Some have also seen in it the work of other painters, in particular Bugiardini and Granacci.

Noah's Sacrifice

The theme represented here is of doubtful identity: it cannot be (GENESIS VIII, 20) Noah giving thanks to God (as it appears to be and is normally entitled) since it comes before the picture of the Flood. So it might be the *Sacrifice of Abel and Cain* or the *Sacrifice of Abraham*, who is thanking God for not having had to kill his son. Because much of the plaster fell away, this part was restored by Carnevale in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Original Sin

The two scenes of the temptation and the expulsion are separated by the tree, out of which emerge evil (the serpent) and divine vengeance (the angel). Note how the faces of Adam and Eve have aged after their sin.

Creation of Eve

(GENESIS II, 21) Eve has been praised at great length by the critics for her gracefulness, beauty, and vitality, in contrast to the inactivity of Adam and the firmness of the Eternal's gesture.

Creation of Adam

(GENESIS I, 26) The gesture of the creator is one of the best known of artistic images and numerous different meanings have been attributed to it. Just as many different meanings have been given to the eleven angelic figures accompanying God, and in particular to the figure that he is embracing (interpreted variously as Eve, the Madonna, Ideaa, and the Soul).

Separation of the Waters

(GENESIS I, 9) This scene refers to the third day of creation when the waters were gathered together and the dry land appeared.

Creation of the Heavenly Bodies

The figure with its back turned is Chaos fleeing before the creation of the sun and moon.

Division of the Light from the Darkness

(GENESIS I, 4) This refers to the first day of creation.