

"It's De Rigueur": 'House of David's Stephen Lang On Why He Had To Do a Biblical Epic [Exclusive]

CHRIS MCPHERSON

Stephen Lang has played his fair share of commanding figures, from ruthless military leaders to hardened warriors, but in *House of David*, the *Avatar* star takes on a different kind of authority, one whose power comes from on high. Way on high. Lang plays Samuel, the last judge of Israel, in the upcoming biblical epic, a role that he describes as both pivotal to the story and deeply complex. Speaking with Collider, Lang revealed what drew him to the role and how he worked with creators Jon Erwin (*Jesus Revolution*, *American Underdog*) and Jon Gunn (*Ordinary Angels*), to figure out Samuel's place in the series.

Lang went on to describe Samuel as a man who has been responsible for the tribes of Israel since childhood, carrying out what he believes to be God's will. His role in *House of David* is significant not just because of his spiritual leadership, but because he is the one who anoints Saul (Ali Suliman) as the first king of Israel, only to later deliver the devastating news that God has withdrawn His favor from Saul in favor of another — David (Michael Iskander).

"He carries a tremendous amount of authority. We're dealing with a story here, a narrative that encompasses many kings—kings of Amalekites, Philistines, kings of Israel. And yet, in many ways, Samuel is the authority figure because he's not in any service or bondage to any king. The only one he serves is the Lord God."

Despite his intrigue with the role, Lang wasn't quick to sign on. He wanted to make sure the series was taking the right approach to its storytelling and that it wouldn't be just another retelling of well-known biblical events.

"I was asked to do the role, and I was intrigued with it. I had never done a biblical drama before, and, you know, every actor has to do a biblical drama at some point—it's de rigueur," Lang joked.

"But I had questions. And so the Jons [Erwin and Gunn] and I Zoomed for close to two hours as I was considering the project. I wanted to understand the ethic of the project—the process, what it meant to them, and what their aims were before I would sign on. What were some of the angles they were taking that I wanted to understand before doing this show?"

Ultimately, Lang was impressed by what he heard. "They not only spoke well on the Zoom—well enough to convince me to come aboard—but then, throughout filming, the way they went about their work did nothing but verify the confidence that I had in the first place to work with them. They're good fellows to work with, for sure."

Lang also praised *House of David* for taking a more dramatic, visually engaging approach to the biblical text. While the Old Testament is rich in events and historical moments, it doesn't exactly provide a clear read on individual characters and their emotions. "The Old Testament—First and Second Samuel—it's filled with event and incident, but it's not easy to get a read on character," Lang noted. "It's not easy to get a read on texture or the things that go into making a cinematic experience, a visual experience."

That's where the creative team's more interpretative approach came in, thankfully for Lang.

"What's really important when you're adapting something as popular as the Bible is to do everything you can to serve the spirit of it — the ethic of the book, the feelings that it engenders. And I think it's perfectly permissible, and wise, to then extrapolate from them. There's no way to really understand the character of Samuel other than to speculate and to imagine."

Lang compared the approach of *House of David* to how history and legend often blend together in storytelling. "This is very much where history and legend really come together," he said. "And this is not exclusive to the *House of David* or the Bible — this happens with much of history throughout the ages. Whether it be Joan of Arc or the Alamo, legend and history are not distinct. They coalesce and form something."

A key aspect of House of David is its dedication to authenticity, something Lang appreciated when it came to filming in real, expansive landscapes on the outskirts of Athens, Greece — where Collider visited the set — instead of relying on soundstages or CGI.

“When I’m on the top of a craggy peak, sacrificing a calf or a heifer, and the wind is just — you know — we are out there in the elements, and the wind is blowing through your hair... you can’t beat that,” he said. “Yeah, we could put it in a studio, and I’d do the best I could, but to actually have the dust and the swirl and the heat and then the cold and the light and the mist—it’s just extremely helpful.”

Lang believes that the setting added to the realism of his performance, making him feel more connected to the material. “You feel closer to the source of all of this,” he added. And while Lang is known for his roles as both heroes and villains, he relished the opportunity to play someone so deeply rooted in righteousness. “I’ve played a lot of fairly ruthless characters over the years,” he said. “So the opportunities to play characters who have warmth, who experience love, and who can be funny — I really dig that, too. Samuel presents a real platform for that kind of thing.”

House of David premieres on Prime Video on February 27.