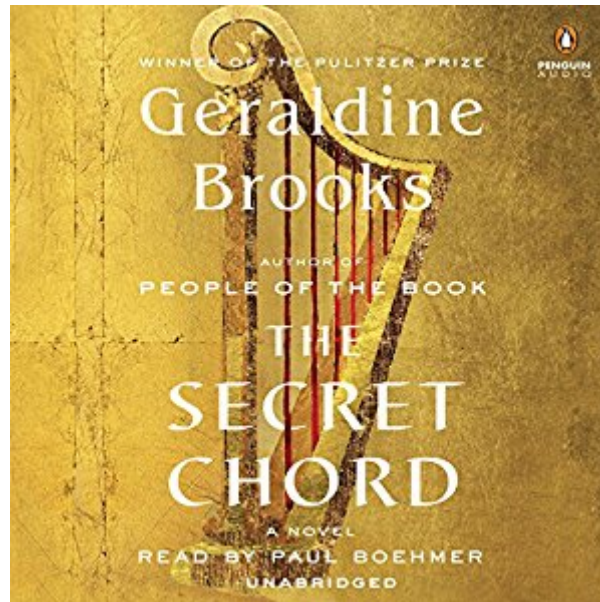


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# The Secret Chord: A Novel



## Synopsis

A rich and utterly absorbing novel about the life of King David, from the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *People of the Book* and *March*. With more than two million copies of her novels sold, New York Times best-selling author Geraldine Brooks has achieved both popular and critical acclaim. Now, Brooks takes on one of literature's richest and most enigmatic figures: a man who shimmers between history and legend. Peeling away the myth to bring David to life in Second Iron Age Israel, Brooks traces the arc of his journey from obscurity to fame, from shepherd to soldier, from hero to traitor, from beloved king to murderous despot and into his remorseful and diminished dotage. *The Secret Chord* provides new context for some of the best-known episodes of David's life while also focusing on others, even more remarkable and emotionally intense, that have been neglected. We see David through the eyes of those who love him or fear him - from the prophet Nathan, voice of his conscience; to his wives, Mikal, Avigail, and Batsheva; and finally to Solomon, the late-born son who redeems his Lear-like old age. Brooks has an uncanny ability to hear and transform characters from history, and this beautifully written, unvarnished saga of faith, desire, family, ambition, betrayal, and power will enthrall her many fans.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 13 hours and 6 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Penguin Audio

Audible.com Release Date: October 6, 2015

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B0143PIPKY

Best Sellers Rank: #194 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Religious

Fiction #194 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Short Stories #447

in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Religious & Inspirational > Historical

## Customer Reviews

King David. A man like any other, though one who triumphs and fails in spectacular fashion. One whose life lives on in the words of the Bible. Yet, there is so much more to a life than what any Bible can capture - particularly a life such as his. In "The Secret Chord", Geraldine Brooks attempts to

show the reader who David may have been as a person. Not just what was captured in the Bible, but his whole life. His motivations, his character, his flaws...everything that defined who he was. Written from the perspective of his ever-present courtier, Nathan (Natan in the book), "The Secret Chord" largely succeeds in its goal. I will be frank - I came to this book not because I was really all that interested in David. I grew up in a religious household, and am familiar with him, but I am not what I would deem "religious" these days. I actually decided to read this book because I had loved Brooks' "People of the Book" and wanted to read another of her books. So that perspective may color my review. I am not interested in exact historical accuracies as compared to the Bible (though from what I remember, she did an excellent job with that as well). I \*am\* interested in learning more about what makes people function, and such a large character as King David is no different. Brooks starts the book by creating the opportunity for Natan to write David's history. Not only does David give permission for Natan, he sends out orders to those who might resist speaking to the prophet. As was usually the case, there was more to David's agreement than was originally apparent...but that comes later (I don't do spoilers). From there, the book covers David's whole life - from conception to his pronouncement of Solomon as king, and everything in between. It is honest and unflinching about David's faults, while still celebrating his accomplishments. As a book, it is very well written. The prose might be a bit wordy or slow for some, but it seemed to fit the subject well to me. King David is believed to have composed a large part of the Book of Psalms in the Bible, and as such, would have been the worse for wear if the writing had been too heavy-handed. And while David is the largest part of the book, those around him shine as well. Their characters have been fully fleshed out and contribute to the book as a whole. Honestly, I wasn't sure what I would end up thinking about the book. While I went in knowing it was centered around a character in the Bible, I was hoping it wouldn't be...pushy...about the religion. It was far from that. Yes, his beliefs do figure largely into the book, as was necessary, but it never veers into preaching territory. Brooks had a very fine line to walk in that regard, and she did it quite well. Overall, I was surprised by how much I really enjoyed the novel. I stayed up late to finish, even knowing the eventual outcome. Kudos to Brooks for delivering such an excellent story, based on someone many people might have different opinions about, without crossing into either woe-is-me or pushy territory. Definitely a book I will recommend to others, Christian or not, simply for the amazing story contained within.

Geraldine Brooks is a mastercrafts woman when it comes to writing. This topic is one of her most ambitious yet as she brings to life the story of King David. I have to admit I struggled with the first three chapters as it's not her normal style however this sets the scene for the book so relevant even

if felt a bit rigid. Once I got to the fourth chapter the writing changed slightly and the characters sprang to life. Wow, could not put it down. The story was well researched and brought to life the life and times of the Old Testament, bloody battles, adultery, family feuds and strategies that founded Israel. I thoroughly enjoyed this book, and recommend pushing through the first few chapters and know you will enjoy the ride.

In her previous novel, "People of the Book", Geraldine Brooks creates a plausible, but fictional back story for the "Sarajevo Haggadah". In "The Secret Chord", she utilizes the biblical narrative and her imagination to weave the story of King David and the prophet Nathan. And she succeeds once more in telling a very engaging tale. Having studied the biblical text many years ago, I found myself returning to it to refresh my memory. Doing so, while reading the novel definitely added to my enjoyment. I liked that the author transliterated Hebrew names and some of the Hebrew words from the "Book of Samuel".

I admire her imaginative telling of the Story of David and the manner in which she sets and keeps a rather archaic tone in her writing from first page to last. There is blood, lust and gore aplenty as befits the Old Testament. I enjoyed every minute with the book and I think that was due to the fact that I had the audio book playing as I read along in the text. I have not one criticism of this book. But, I caution readers not to draw parallels between David and today's rulers or our society. \*Commentary\* magazine carries an insightful article on this point where it points out that David had an overwhelming and intimate relationship with the Named which does not and can not exist today. This book is a magnificent exercise in imagination and may even send some readers to the OT to read about David and the gorgeous songs attributed to him. .

Generally I like Brooks a lot. She's a fine writer, and here I found the ending living up to her reputation. I bought the book for its title reference to Leonard Cohen, and suddenly I found myself reading a Bible story. Word for word, as I read back through the Old Testament! I had no memory (from childhood Bible stories) of King David as such a violent, dissolute character. Frankly, I prefer my childhood version. And yet I was drawn in and those ancient times became very clear. I liked the narrator, Nathan, very much. The mistreatment of women (chattel that they were) in that ancient patriarchal society was horrifying. Has it changed so much in our modern patriarchal society? I thought Brooks went overboard on the graphic violence and gore. The chapter on the rape of Tamar was more than I needed to know. Such depictions of violence ruin otherwise good books for me,

and this is no exception. Absolutely, this book provokes thought (and revulsion) and is suitable for book club discussion. However, for a riveting read about the ancient Hebrews, I would recommend Anita Diamant's "The Red Tent" instead.

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