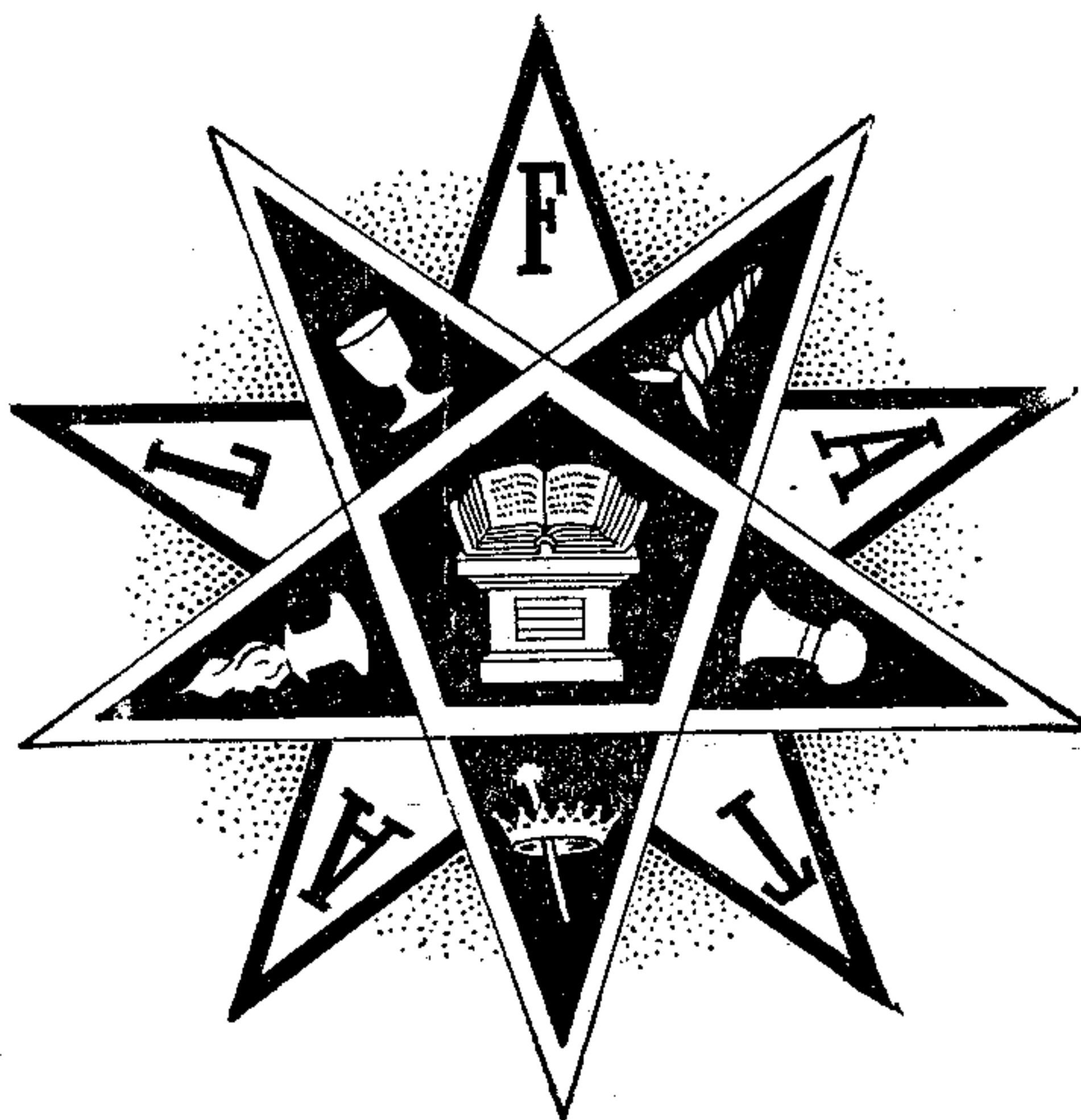


# The Tragedy of the Death of Jephthah's Daughter

## Historical Story of the First Star Point

The First of Five Stories Covering the History of the Star Points

# 5  
Folder 1



DAKOTA  
MASONIC  
GRAND LODGE  
LIBRARY  
O. E. S. GRAND  
CHAPTER LIBRARY



ROBABLY the greatest feature of the story of Jephthah's daughter—outside the voluntary surrender of her life—is one that is seldom mentioned. It is the disgrace of her death.

According to the Israelitish custom of her time, it was a positive disgrace for a woman to die a virgin. Hebrew women looked with horror and aversion upon the thought of a childless death, a death without the prior enjoyment of bridal festivities and nuptial celebrations.

Not only, therefore, was the untimely death of the daughter of the captain of Gilead a tragedy in itself; it was a disgrace in the eyes of her friends and country-women.

At no place in the book of Judges (where the story is related) is the name of Jephthah's daughter mentioned. She is always merely "Jephthah's daughter." The name of Adah was an invention of Bro. Rob. Morris, but was a peculiarly happy choice. It means "powerful perfume, strength and sweetness" and so it adequately expresses the individuality, as well as the character, of this daughter of Gilead.

Jephthah was an illegitimate child of the tribe of Manasseh. He was a forceful character as a boy, and ruled his several half-brothers with a rod of iron, until they became older and learned of his illegitimacy when they drove him away from home by combining against him. He was also refused any share in his father's estate after the death of the latter. He fled into the land of Tob, where he immediately began to surround himself with other homeless characters and outlaws and became himself a border outlaw and chieftain.

His success in his lawless career was immediate and sure, resulting in a steadily growing little army which Jephthah, with his inborn force of character and sense of command, held under strict discipline and which he slowly forged into a military weapon of no mean standing. He became an expert in the military tactics of his day and defeated the Midianites as well as the tribe of Manasseh on several occasions. He also fought many battles for the King of Tob.

In the meantime the Israelites—after the death of Jair,—again forsook the Lord and worshipped

"The Gods of strangers." The Ammonites began to constantly war against them with steadily-growing success. The Israelitish army was well equipped but was without any proper leadership. At last the very life of the nation, as well as the existence of the people themselves, was seriously endangered by their numerous and war-like foes.

In this serious crisis, the leaders of Israel met to select someone to lead them in their national defense. Individual quarrels and tribal jealousies were, for the moment, forgotten. Some of the elders were Jephthah's own half-brothers, and his reputation as a military genius, as well as his almost universal success in battle, finally led to the unanimous proposal and selection as commander-in-chief and virtual dictator of the nation from which he had earlier been ejected in disgrace. It was not, however, until after several deputations had visited him that Jephthah was induced to accept the leadership thus voluntarily offered. He did so eventually, with a distinct understanding that, if successful, he was to become the unquestioned leader of Israel.

After this had been agreed to, Jephthah assumed control of the Israelitish army and prepared for battle with the Ammonites. It was immediately prior to his departure with his army, that Jephthah entered into a compact with the Lord:

"If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into my hands, then it shall be, That whatsoever cometh forth from out the doors of my house, to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, it shall surely be the Lord's; and I will offer it up for a burnt offering."

The successful prosecution of the war and Jephthah's victorious return to Mizpah can be read in the Eleventh chapter of Judges. His elation over his outstanding victory and his joy and pride over his well-earned position as the head of Israel was soon changed to grief and consternation, when his daughter—always the pride and joy of his heart—came forth out of his house to meet him "with timbrels and rejoicing."

Imagine, if you can, the feeling of this father torn between loyalty to his vow and his father-love! His own honor or his love for his daughter! A foresworn man and dishonored leader or a childless father! His future life blackened by an unfulfilled vow or darkened by a lonesome old

age! It was a choice that brought anguish to his spirit and a look of despair to the face of the undefeated soldier.

When Adah was appraised of the cause of her father's distracted appearance, her sense of duty knew no hesitancy. She too, had a choice to make, and it was made without hesitation. It was her life against her father's honor! With a full knowledge of all that her death as an unmarried maiden would mean to her memory, she did not hesitate. "Do unto me according to that which hath proceeded out of thine mouth!"

She gained a short respite of two months in which to go to the mountains to prepare herself by meditation and study for her death and "bewail my virginity, I and my companions." At the end of the allotted time she returned homeward and Jephthah's ill-considered and rash vow was consummated. It is reported that "for many years afterwards the girls of Israel went year after year to the mountains of Gilead for four days to commemorate the historic sacrifice of the daughter of Jephthah."

By the sad story of Adah, the lesson of filial devotion is taught, as well as the Masonic virtue of the strict observance of promises and vows. Jephthah's vow may have been ill-considered but once made, had to be observed.

The color of this degree is blue in allusion to the blue appearance of the mountains of Gilead where, in her home in Mizpah, Adah lived and died, and in a cave in which she resided for two months while preparing for the sacrifice. When seen under the clear sky of Palestine, the peaks are intensely blue. The choice of symbols is self-explanatory. "Adah" was the subject of one of Lord Tennyson's poems, "The Dream of Fair Women."

The scene of the story of the First Star Point is the far side of the Jordan, in Mizpah, the early home of Jephthah. It was about ninety miles northeast of Jerusalem and about thirty miles from the sea of Galilee. The countries of Gilead and Ammon are on the east side of the Jordan toward the north.

(The story of one of the greatest match-makers of all time—of a step-mother who succeeded in marrying her penniless stepdaughter to a man of wealth and influence—will be told next month when the story of Ruth, the Second Star Point, will be published.)