

### The Assembly (Qehol)

- According to the tally (Ezra 2:1-67), there were nearly 30,000 men and another 12,000 or so women. Another 7,500 or so servants and musicians accompanied them.
- They represented about 50 villages and neighborhoods from the Judean Highlands around Jerusalem. Not surprisingly, archaeological surveys show a tremendous increase in population at this time (Carter 1999, 223-224). The towns mentioned are mostly on the western and southern slopes, headed toward the Mediterranean Sea.
- Donations to the rebuilding of the temple were around 15,250 oz of gold and 100,000 oz of silver. That's about \$220 million in gold and \$2.5 million in silver.
- Sacrifices began in the 7th month of their first year but the foundations was not laid until the 2nd month of their second - about 8 months of work.



### Opposition (Tzariy)

The returning exiles were not the only people in the area who claimed to worship YHWH, the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob. The “scholarly” term for these people is Yahwists, rather than “Jews” or “Israelites.”

- **Judahite Remnants:** only the upper class had been taken into exile, so the majority of the population had stayed behind. Because Babylon had basically abandoned the area, they were living in a state of disarray. Fields were left fallow, and trade was non-existent.
- **Samaritans:** Although it is unclear how, apparently a group of non-Israelites were transplanted in Samaria by the Assyrians (Ezra 4:2) and adopted the worship of YHWH, probably before Judah was taken in 586 BC.

In addition, there were other pockets of people who claimed to follow YHWH and identified as Jewish.

- **Egyptian Immigrants:** Some of the remnant had fled to Egypt (Jer 41-44). They established a military and intellectual city at Elephantine, and eventually set up their own temple and priesthood.
- **Babylonian Residents:** The majority of Judahites chose not to return to *Yehud* (the Persian name for Judah). They lived in an area called *Babylonians āl-Yāhūdu* (literally, “Jew Town”). They were joined by Yahwist descendants of the Israelites who were captured by the Assyrians in 722 BC, the so-called “lost tribes.”

While those in Egypt and Babylon developed their own distinct culture and eventually practices and literature, the Yahwist communities around *Yehud* became increasingly hostile to the returning exiles.

The governor Zerubbabel refused to allow the Samaritans and remnants to build a companion temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:2), they managed to block work on the temple for several years by making it appear as if everyone in the satrap was opposed to the rebuilding (Ezra 4:10).



A cuneiform tablet from *āl-Yāhūdu*, written in Aramaic by Samak Yama, a Jew living in exile there in the 6th century BC.