Kallai’s book is the most complete, comprehensive and profound study to date of the geographical lists in the Book of Joshua which describe the territorial allotments to the Tribes of Israel. The discussion, extending over four hundred pages, is based on two fundamental assumptions. 1) The geographical lists in the Book of Joshua reflect an historical reality. “We assume, as we have said, that the description of the tribal boundaries is not the product of theory, vision and promise, but rather that its connection to precise geographical conditions proves that it was guided by a reality known to the scribes from either a written or an immediate source” (p. 244). 2) The date of the geographical lists must be determined by an historical, not a literary, criterion. Therefore, the author devotes the first part of his book (pp. 19-83) to an historical review of three ages in the history of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel: a) the period of the settlement and of the Judges; b) the age of David and Solomon; c) the monarchial age of Israel and Judah.

This review starts out with the geographical lists whose setting, in the author’s opinion, definitely resembles David’s census (II Sam. 24:2) and Solomon’s list of districts (I Ki. 4). The author’s conclusion in the first part is that Israelite rule extended over the entire Land of Israel only during the period of David and Solomon, and neither previous nor subsequent to that (pp. 80-83).

The second and third parts of the book are devoted to a geographical and historical analysis of the system of tribal boundaries in the Book of Joshua (pp. 87-271). The author concludes that “The only period which fits the historical background of the boundaries is the period of the United Monarchy, the reigns of David and Solomon, principally in the latter part of David’s and during Solomon’s reign” (p. 235).

If the author finds one uniform historical background for the tribal boundaries it is not in relation to the city-lists embedded in the geographical lists in the Book of Joshua (Part Four, pp. 275-375). His opinion is
that the lists are not contemporaneous; in any case, they are not based on a unified document from the period of Josiah, as A. Alt maintained. The list of the cities of Judah dates from the time of Hezekiah (p. 286), the list of the cities of Benjamin reflects the extent of the conquests of Abijah, King of Judah (p. 285), the list of the cities of Dan is identical with the second district of Solomon (pp. 292, 299), and the list of the cities of Simeon reflects the historical-territorial situation in the time of David (pp. 292, 299). The rest of the city-lists were linked mainly to the description of the portions and complement it, and therefore they date from the time of the editors of the description of the boundaries (p. 277).

Like other commentators, Kallai assumes that the Levitical city-lists (Josh. 21; I Chron. 6) date from the United Monarchy (Part Five, pp. 379-403), or more precisely, from the second half of Solomon’s reign, before the transference of the territory of Kabul to Hiram (p. 387).

The reader of Kallai’s book will certainly be impressed with his erudition in the subject, with his consistency and the way in which he locates the lists of tribal holdings in their appropriate framework by applying known and accepted methods, in harmony with the mass of historical material.

The attached map, the tables and detailed index so facilitate following the elaborate discussion that the work becomes an important reference book for the historical geography of Eretz-Israel (the Land of Israel) in the Biblical period.

In spite of the profound discussion and convincing theses of the author, the book does not, of course, offer a full and perfect solution to the problems of the geographical lists in the Book of Joshua. The nature of the Biblical material, especially of the lists under discussion, “offers room for the abundance of commentators, each according to his own method” (p. 137). And so, the various scholars who have dealt with this subject have put forward equally various, contradictory solutions. It is well, therefore, that Kallai has prefaced his book with a general introduction (pp. 1-15) in which he reviews the principal opinions expressed by various commentators concerning the nature and dating of the geographical documents.

Summarised by Bustenai Oded
Why does the Bible list 13 tribes of Israel? Why is Manasseh called a “half tribe”? And why is Jesus called the “Lion of the tribe of Judah?” Here’s your quick guide to the tribes of Israel.  

The tribe of kings, and the most preeminent of the 12 tribes in the biblical narrative. Judah prevailed over his brothers (1 Chronicles 5:2), and the tribe’s territory included the city of Jerusalem and the holy temple. King David was part of this tribe, and his royal line ruled in Jerusalem from around 1,000 BC until the city fell to Babylonian forces in 586 BC.  

What a great article and resource. As a layperson who studied business and government, this is such a helpful tool. I will share it with a friend in seminary. It fills in some gaps from my own reading in a study Bible and a commentary. Very helpful. The study of historical geography provides a greater confidence in the Bible as God’s Word and instills a greater love for the God of the Bible. Those who study geography, coupled with a study-trip to Israel, experience an even greater benefit than those who simply study in class. The spiritual lives of those who study historical geography are enriched.  

A knowledge of Israel’s geography serves as an additional way to retain the truth of a passage. Remembering what a location looks like enables one to picture the action, to remember the event, to imagine its occurrence in a way that enables retention. Also many events took place in the same location, which also helps to tie the Bible together better. The journey of Israel's twelve tribes begins in the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.  

Many scholars feel the 12 tribes of Israel were joined together out of a joint historical need, whether the threat of invasion, famine, or some other happening. The Habiru formed just out of such circumstances. One such possible need can be seen in the massive waves of refugee migration sweeping through Europe.  

The root origin of the 12 tribes of Israel can be traced in the genealogical records found throughout the Old Testament. Scholars simply dismiss the notion of detailed family records being kept in ancient Israel when assessing the validity of Scripture. The ancient Hebrews /Israelites maintained family records with excruciating detail.