In 539 B.C.E., Cyrus led the Persians in the conquest of Babylonia. Two years later, he issued a decree allowing conquered peoples to return to their lands. The news stirred the Jewish exiles in Babylonia, and the prophet reflects that excitement. The Haftarah begins with the announcement that the road to return has now been cleared: God has opened the highway from Babylonia to the Land of Israel. The prophet then expresses a fear that moral corruption—which he views as the cause of the exile—will soon rear its head again. The thought of return, with its promise of rebuilding the Temple, launches the prophet into an attack on religious hypocrisy. Ritual devotion, he asserts, must be accompanied by ethical behavior.

This morning’s Torah reading focused on an elaborate ritual for purifying the sanctuary. Now the Haftarah emphasizes that the aim of ritual is to transform our behavior. In juxtaposing these two biblical passages, the Rabbis have provided us with a telling measure of their understanding of Judaism.

**Verse 15.** The prophet employs contrasting imagery: though God is on high, divine concern is focused on the most lowly.
VERSE 13. IF YOU CALL SHABBAT "DELIGHT" You have entered into a life of observance of the mitzvot, ritual involves moments of joy, of sadness, of serious reflection, and of meditation. These comprise the range of human emotion, allowing us to experience the fullness of our humanity.
B'RAKHOT AFTER THE HAF-TARAH. A series of b’rakhot concludes the reading from the Prophets. The earliest synagogue services may have centered on the public reading of biblical passages, and the prayers concluding the reading may well have formed the original core of the synagogue service. For example, the prayers concluding our reading mention the sanctity of the day and express messianic longing—two themes likewise featured in the Amidah. In ancient times, the public biblical reading also included a selection from the third division of the Hebrew Bible, known as the Writings.

WHO ACCOMPLISHES WHAT IS SPOKEN? B'RAKHOT B'KOH.

At the opening of Genesis, God's word effectuates all that is created: “God said... and it was so.” Our liturgy asserts that God will likewise carry out the promises recorded in the scriptural passages that we have just read aloud and studied.

MAY YOUR PROMISES PROVE TRUE. B'RAKHOT B'KOH.

On the Days of Awe we talk of God’s teaching as an everlasting truth and we then conclude by declaring God’s sovereignty over all the earth. God’s sovereignty is identified here with the truthful and eternal teaching of Torah.