

In John 1:21, who is “that prophet” the Jews were asking about?

In John 1:19–21 (NIV), a group of Jewish priests and Levites were sent from Jerusalem to question John the Baptist. The passage says:

“Now this was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, ‘I am not the Messiah.’ They asked him, ‘Then who are you? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ He answered, ‘No.’”

(John 1:19–21, NIV)

They asked him three important questions:

1. Are you the Messiah?
2. Are you Elijah?
3. Are you the Prophet?

John denies all three titles. The first two are clear: he is not the Messiah (Christ), nor Elijah (who was expected to return according to Malachi 4:5–6). But the third question—“Are you the Prophet?”—raises the key issue: Who is “the Prophet” being

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referred to?

Understanding “The Prophet” in John 1:21

To understand this term, we need to go back to Deuteronomy 18:15–18 (NIV), where Moses said:

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.”

(Deut. 18:15, NIV)

This was a Messianic prophecy—God promised to raise a prophet “like Moses”, someone who would speak God’s words with divine authority. The Jewish people took this prophecy seriously and were expecting this prophet to come. Over time, some came to believe this “Prophet” might be a separate figure from the Messiah or Elijah. That’s why they asked John three separate questions.

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The New Testament Confirms “The Prophet” Is Jesus

The New Testament confirms that Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy. In Acts 3:22–23 (NIV), the apostle Peter says:

“For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.’”
(Acts 3:22–23, NIV)

Peter makes it crystal clear: Jesus is the prophet Moses spoke about. He is not one of many—He is the Prophet, the Messiah, and the Son of God all in one.

So, when John the Baptist was asked, “Are you that prophet?” he rightly said “No,” because Jesus was the fulfillment of that prophecy, not him.

Misinterpretations: Was “That Prophet” Referring to Muhammad?

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Some claim that the phrase “that prophet” in John 1:21 refers to Muhammad. This interpretation is not biblically supported.

Biblical Context.

The passage clearly distinguishes “that prophet” from John the Baptist and from Elijah, but it also ties to Moses’ prophecy in Deuteronomy. As already shown, the New Testament declares Jesus, not Muhammad, as the fulfillment.

Jesus as the Final Revelation:

The New Testament teaches that Jesus is the final and complete revelation of God.

“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...”
(Hebrews 1:1-2, NIV)

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”

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(Revelation 22:13, NIV)

There is no room for a future prophet with new revelation. Any prophet or teacher after Christ must point back to Jesus, not claim new divine authority apart from Him.

Why Did the Jews Expect More than One Figure?

During the first century, there was a lot of confusion and speculation among the Jews due to the 400-year prophetic silence following the prophet Malachi. Many were expecting the return of:

- The Messiah — The promised deliverer (Isaiah 9:6-7)
- Elijah — As prophesied in Malachi 4:5-6
- “The Prophet” — From Deuteronomy 18:15

Some even expected the resurrection or return of Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah or Isaiah. This is evident in passages such as:

- Matthew 16:13-14 (NIV):

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“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

• Luke 9:7-8 (NIV):

“But when Herod heard this, he said, ‘John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!’ Some were saying Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life.”

This confusion explains why the Jewish leaders asked John the Baptist if he was the Messiah, Elijah, or “the Prophet.”

Final Conclusion

John the Baptist was not “that prophet.” He was the forerunner of the Lord, the voice in the wilderness (Isaiah 40:3), preparing the way for Jesus Christ.

The Prophet that Moses spoke about is Jesus, not Muhammad or

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anyone else. Jesus is:

- The Prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15, Acts 3:22)
- The Messiah, the Christ (John 4:25-26)
- The Son of God (John 1:34)
- The final and complete Word from God (Hebrews 1:1-2)

Therefore, we are not waiting for another prophet or revelation. All truth and salvation are found in Jesus Christ alone.

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”
(Acts 4:12, NIV)

May the Lord bless you with deeper understanding and unwavering faith in Jesus Christ — the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

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