

Christian Reality Star Pleads Guilty to Multiple Counts of Child Rape

Toby Willis, of TLC's *The Willis Family*, pleaded guilty to four counts of child rape and will serve 40 years in prison.

"The Willis family would like to thank their family, friends and fans for their support during this most difficult year," the Christian family's attorney said in a statement.

"The family has remained fully cooperative throughout this investigation. Although the criminal case has concluded with Toby Willis receiving 40 years for the crimes he committed, the impact on the victims will remain much longer."

Willis is the patriarch of the singing family The Willis Clan. The 12 kids and their two parents found fame in a previous season of *America's Got Talent* before they made their way to TLC.

"Preacher's Kid" Toby is one of the surviving children of Rev. Duane "Scott" Willis and his wife, Janet, who lost their six youngest children, five boys and a girl, in an horrific 1994 automobile accident, according to the *Washington Times*.

TLC followed the traveling group, and the family appeared to be quite happy with how they were sharing the gospel. But in August, 2016, their world came crashing down.

The *Daily Beast* reports:

The TBI began investigating Willis on Aug. 29 after receiving information that Willis had a sexual encounter about 12 years ago with an underage child, according to a police statement issued after Willis's arrest. In Tennessee, the charge of child rape applies to the sexual assault of children between

the ages of 3 and 12.

Nashville's Newschannel5 reported Wednesday night that Willis had allegedly been charged with raping a family member. It said the family member had been "removed by Willis from her bed and raped." It also reported that "authorities confirmed Willis was not allowed to go around his biological children or his wife."

His family has been torn apart by the arrest and subsequent trial.

"I was shocked and devastated by the revelation of events leading to Toby Willis' arrest," Brenda Willis' attorney said in a statement on her behalf. "As these are very trying times for the Willis family, I kindly ask all to respect our family's privacy. As a mother of 12, my first priority remains with my children and helping them through this traumatic event.

"We are cancelling all appearances for the foreseeable future to focus on the children and their well-being. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause. We have, and will continue, to fully cooperate with law enforcement officials and ask that you direct all inquiries regarding Toby Willis' case to the district attorney's office who have our complete support."

Many fans compared the large family to the Duggars, another Christian family who was torn apart by abuse allegations.

"A lot of people compare us to (to the Duggars)," daughter Jennifer Willis says. " ... We actually don't know that much about them. We just try to be ourselves and we do what we do and try to not make too many comparisons." {eo}