Hagar and Ishmael

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God-this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom. 12-1-2). No, you did not fall asleep like Rip Van Winkle and awaken 20 years hence when we are studying Romans (although when that thought came to mind, I counted 1042 chapters between Gen. 16 and Romans 12 so 1 per week would be 20 years). Knowing God’s will for our lives is an elusive objective, after all who can know the mind of God. Even knowing God’s will may not be enough as we may know the destination but not the path. Such was the case with Abram who had received promises from God beginning years earlier in Ur.

God’s promises to Abram became more and more specific culminating with the promise that Abram would be blessed with a son. One would think that if anyone could know God’s plan for his life will it would be Abram who had numerous conversations with God. Abram knew he was destined to have a son but it had been 10 years since he had left Haran. His wife Sarai was equally disappointed that they had no children, so much so that she proposed a solution that was common at the time. They would have a surrogate child through Sarai’s maidservant Hagar whom they acquired in Egypt. Abram agreed perhaps thinking that while God told him he would have a son, God made no mention of Sarai. Maybe they had failed to carry out God’s will by waiting for Sarai to have a child when they could have had one earlier through Hagar.

Hagar became pregnant but Sarai’s anticipated joy became buyer’s remorse. Hagar began to despise Sarai probably because she felt that she had become more than a servant since she was carrying Abram’s child. Their conflict grew to the point that Hagar left to return to Egypt. Along the way she encounters the angel of the Lord, the first of numerous appearances of the angel of the Lord. In most instances, the term “the angel of the Lord” is a reference to Jesus who appears as a Christophany. Notice that the angel tells Hagar “***I*** will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count”. Hagar recognizes the angel to be Jesus (v. 13). Below is a link to an interesting article discussing this topic.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_26.cfm>

The angel reveals prophecy about Ishmael who is generally regarded as the father of the Arab nations. In Galatians, Paul contrasts the 2 sons of Abram, Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael is seen as representing the old covenant and Isaac representing the new covenant (Gal 4:21-31).

As we examine how Abram responded throughout these events, note the following:

1. Abram failed as the spiritual leader of the family. When Hagar made the proposal to him he should have rebuked her instead of participating.
2. Abram did not take personal responsibility for the situation. When the conflict arose between Sarai and Hagar, Abram chose to stay out of it rather than protecting Hagar.
3. Abram decided to take matters into his own hands rather than waiting for God to provide a son.
4. Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from this is contained in the scripture with which I began this lesson. Paul wrote that we should not be conformed to the pattern of this world. Abram wanted a son and would do whatever was necessary to make that happen even if that meant a sinful relationship with Hagar. Paul also wrote that we should be transformed by the renewing of our minds. In seeking God’s will for our lives, we need to prepare ourselves by studying God’s word and praying earnestly. If our perception of God’s will is not consistent with God’s Word then we are mistaken in our understanding. Abram should have realized that God’s marriage plan involved one man and one woman and that Sarai’s plan was not consistent with God’s word.

In closing I’ll leave you with 2 Bible passages to remember as we seek God’s will for our lives. “For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jer. 29:11) and “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5-6).